# TOWARDS THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN INDIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AT INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Health Sciences

**By**

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# DECLARATION

I, Wafa Singh, hereby declare that all the content within this thesis is my own work. Researchers or authors that have contributed to this thesis have been duly acknowledged within.

…  …..12.12.2023…

Signature of student  Date of signature

**Approved for final submission**

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…….  ……

Signature of supervisor  Date of signature

…..12.12.2023….

Signature of co-supervisor  Date of signature

# DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents!

It is dedicated to the unconditional love they have blessed me with; for believing in me, against all odds; for giving me the strength to persevere; for providing me the motivation and encouragement when I needed it; for being the wind beneath my wings, pushing me to fly higher and higher; and most importantly, for being the most solid pillar of support in my life's journey!

Nobody will love me as you do!

This one is for you, Mummy, Papa!

Thank you for everything, said and unsaid!

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*“I am grateful and thankful for the support of so many special people in my life, who have accompanied me in my journey; and without whose support, this study would not have been possible”*

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# ABSTRACT

Human existence, despite being the most advanced today, finds itself at a crossroads and in a state of turmoil and turbulence. The same stands true for India, which, notwithstanding its tremendous human capacities, faces multifaceted challenges with respect to human and social development. These challenges are reinforced when a valuable concept like 'knowledge', with a potential to steer societies amidst these challenging times, in terms of addressing problems and providing solutions; is boxed, siloed and created and shared in a unilateral manner. The role and functioning of Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEI's), within this context is of paramount importance, especially in its capacity as an institution, serving public good. Further, given the demographic dividend that the country is witnessing; Indian HEI's have an enormous responsibility to nurture the massive pool of young graduates into becoming active, responsible and global citizens; through their knowledge production and dissemination function.

It is in this context, that the concept of Community Engagement (CE) in higher education, linked to the broader mandate of academic social responsibility, has gained traction worldwide, and in India as well. However, while the practice of CE has advanced at a much greater pace globally; its trajectory in the Indian higher educational context has lagged behind. Among the many reasons for this, one of the primary ones have been the absence of national empirical studies in this context, which has resulted in the practice being fraught with gaps and inadequacies. Further, the absence of any national framework or guiding model to aid and support the implementation of CE in Indian HEI's, has added to the problems plaguing the practice.

It is against this background that this research study was undertaken, in order to fill the existing gaps in theory and practice of CE in the Indian context, by exploring aspects related to its conceptualization, institutionalization and operationalization. Most importantly, the study developed a framework for guiding and strengthening this area of work in Indian HEI's. To achieve these objectives, the study was situated within an interpretivist paradigm, and adopted qualitative research methodology to explore this topic at eight best-practice Indian HEI's. Semi-structured in-depth interviews, supported by an interview guide, was used to collect data and insights from two sets

of academics (sample 1 belonging to university administrators (vice-chancellors/registrars/deans) and sample 2 belonging to faculty members at the department level). The data was then analysed using thematic analysis to collate and present the findings, which was used to develop the framework for guiding and strengthening CE at Indian HEI's.

The findings of the study shed light on nuanced and exclusive perspectives with respect to the conceptualization, institutionalization and operationalization of CE in the Indian context. This assumes special importance, considering the somewhat thin Indian literature in this context and on such aspects. The study's findings reiterated the importance of institutional core values and clarity on the practice, as building the core of the conceptualization of CE. Further, complete and dedicated institutional commitment, towards adopting a cultural change, and devising mechanisms for placing CE as a core academic practice, is key to its institutionalization. Similarly, operationalization of CE is driven by how well an institution imbibes and adopts the values of dynamism, innovation and creativity, for making its core functions more socially engaged and contextually relevant.

Building on these findings, the study developed a framework for guiding and strengthening the practice of CE in Indian HEI's, while situating the latter within the broader national higher education policy and the institutional policy environment. In particular, the model focuses on the reciprocal and value-driven interplay between the institutional vision, personnel, structures and functions; for producing engaged teaching-learning practices, with the ultimate objective of creating a socially responsible HEI. By articulating critical aspects in relation to formalizing and formulating the practice of CE; the model can serve as an effective guide and a handy tool for academic stakeholders at Indian HEI's. In doing so, the framework aims to support academics in India and beyond, in practicing CE, more meaningfully and effectively for achieving both academic and social development outcomes in the bargain.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**CBPR:** Community Based Participatory Research

**CE:** Community Engagement

**CER:** Community Engaged Research

**CSOs:** Civil Society Organizations

**HEI's**: Higher Education Institutions

**LiL:** Live-in-Labs

**MHRD:** Ministry of Human Resource Development

**NAAC**: National Assessment and Accreditation Council

**NEP:** National Education Policy

**NSS:** National Service Scheme

**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals

**SL:** Service Learning

**SoE:** Scholarship of Engagement

**T-L:** Teaching-learning

**UBA:** Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

**UGC:** University Grants Commission

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNESCO:** United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# CHAPTER ONE:
# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research study, by situating it in a broader context, linking the same to the core idea of the study, and providing an outline of the key concepts and perspectives, along with highlighting its aim, objectives and value. Accordingly, the chapter begins by providing a broad background to the study (section 1.2); followed by highlighting the problem statement and rationale for the same (section 1.3). Further, a section on conceptual frameworks and perspectives in the context of the study is included (section 1.4). This is followed by sections outlining the aim of the study (section 1.5); the research objectives (section 1.6); research questions guiding the study (section 1.7); the significance of the study (section 1.8), and the theoretical framework (section 1.9). Finally, the chapter concludes by providing an overview of how the thesis is structured (section 1.10), followed by a short conclusion (section 1.11).

## 1.2 Background to the study

### 1.2.1 Increasingly developed and interconnected; yet profoundly challenged global societies

We live in a world of worry (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022: iv), where societies are increasingly characterized by diversity, complexity, uncertainty, risk and hyper connectivity (Blessinger, Sengupta and Makhanya 2021: 337). The human civilization today, although being the most technologically and economically advanced; yet faces one of the most tumultuous and turbulent periods in its entire existential history (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2015: 9). Among the most pressing and emergent concerns, has been the global climate crisis and ecological disasters; geopolitical wars ravaging countries and continents, catalysing crisis at multiple levels; widening social inequalities; deprivation and injustice; and fragmented social systems (Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 392; Chang *et al.* 2020: 699; Hall and Tandon 2021: 1; UNDP 2022: 4). Although the contextual challenges vary and play out differently across

regions; most of them are a troubling manifestation of a global crisis which is unsettling lives around the world (Tandon *et al.* 2016: 21; UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC 2021: 17; UNDP 2022: 8). Further, such challenges are often characterized by their innately complex, uncertain and intersecting nature, which cannot be solved by standard approaches and are mostly resistant to any linear, scientific or disciplinary analysis (Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 392; Lang et al. 2017, cited in Chang *et al.* 2020: 712).

Such complex problems have been widely referenced in the global literature as 'wicked problems', a term originally coined by Rittel and Webber (1973: 160) in the context of planning and governance. They referred to these, as unique problems, which neither have a definitive formulation, nor have an immediate, conventional or specific solution (Rittel and Webber 1973: 161). Along similar lines, Fitzgerald (2014: 255) referred to such wicked problems as those, for which there are no good ideas about their underlying causal factors or potential solutions. Being accompanied by an extensive web of stakeholders, with complex set of interests (Lavery 2018: 164); Göransson, Donati and Wigren-Kristoferson (2021: 1), characterized such problems as being multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and highly complex. Further, the layering and interactions between such challenges creates new dimensions of uncertainty, where the risks easily propagate, interact and amplify, rather than dissipate (UNDP 2022: 8).

Complicating matters further, are several paradoxes that characterize the situation around the world today (UNESCO 2015: 15; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 21; UNDP 2022: 10). This is manifested in the co-existence of economic globalization with rising unemployment and widening inequalities, and strengthened international human rights framework existing amidst proliferation of violence against women, children, with their rights continuously being undermined (UNESCO 2015: 15; UNDP 2022: 8). Further, material prosperity has come alongside widespread degradation of natural ecosystems; while expansion of democracy has been coupled with increase in insecurity and exclusion (Singh 2017: 2). The crisis of human civilization at this juncture of history is aptly captured and manifested by such inter-related and paradoxical trends (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxii). The cumulative impacts of these trends imply that humanity as a whole, faces enormous global challenges; while also

indicating that the world is fundamentally changing and progressing towards a ‘new normal’ (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxii; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 21). With little hopes of going back, addressing and responding to such destabilizing pressures and complex challenges is the only way forward (UNDP 2022: iii).

Further, the impact emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic, not only made the challenges even more pronounced, but also exacerbated the negative effects of unsolved issues and problems, both in the global North and the global South (Göransson, Donati and Wigren-Kristoferson 2021: 1). The pandemic has demonstrated that the current events are not only complex, but also increasingly unpredictable, in contrast to the linear trajectory that was earlier believed to bring about social development and human progress (UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC 2021: 44). Additionally, it has also exposed the growing mismatch between the world as it is (or one which it is becoming) and the conventional ways of approaching and addressing things (UNDP 2022: 16). In light of these realities, Munck (2021: para. 2 line 4) in his article, reiterated that there can be no return to the ‘status quo’ or ‘business as usual’ for the human society, which is neither possible, nor desirable. He further added that humanity is witnessing a watershed moment, where the only two options for humanity are either renewal or further decline (Munck 2021: para. 3 line 2).

These social realities have brought the focus back on ‘people and the choices they make’, which will determine the collective future of humanity (UNDP 2022: iii). Positioning people as the real wealth of nations; and their choices, as both the hero and the villain of contemporary times, UNDP (2022: iii) called for a new conception of sustainable human development, focusing on promise and opportunities. This requires people to respond to the contemporary uncertainty complex in an agile manner, by breaking down the barriers of conventional thinking, while expanding the horizons of imaginations and possibilities, through experimentation and co-creation (UNDP 2022: 17). Therefore, the UNDP (2022: 21) report put the onus of our collective futures on humans, and reiterated that with shared goals and collective action, the future, however uncertain, will be more promise than peril.

### 1.2.2 Focus on collective impact through collaborative endeavours by societal stakeholders

The complex and the multi-dimensional nature of the wicked problems or the social challenges in general, has also put the spotlight on the urgent need for sustainable development (Mbah, Johnson and Chipindi 2021: 1). In this light, and with renewed attention on people and their choices to steer the way forward; many scholars have proposed multi-stakeholder engagement involving different actors and institutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 393; Ahmadein 2019: 15). This is because solutions that only rely on individual or unilateral efforts, have largely been insufficient to address the thorniest social issues of contemporary times (Appel *et al.* 2023: 442). As a result, multi-stakeholder engagement is the key for developing solutions and providing results, which could not have been done by any individual actor or entity (Fitzgerald 2014: 242; DePrince and DiEnno 2019: 23; UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC 2021: 38). Referring to stakeholder theory, Corazza and Saluto (2021: 1173) highlighted the importance of engaging a network of stakeholders in specific transactions and interactions for solving the grand challenges of sustainability.

Therefore, addressing a wicked problem requires the coming together of diverse perspectives of different stakeholders such as academics, community members, project managers, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, etc. to develop effective responses for shared social and sustainability challenges (Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 394; Murphy *et al.* 2022: 521). Engaging such diverse stakeholders is critical for understanding the nature of complex socio-economic problems and for developing appropriate actionable approaches for managing them (van Riper et al. 2017, cited in Chang *et al.* 2020: 700). Further, collaboration between different actors is required at all levels – local, national and international, for confronting the challenges (Göransson, Donati and Wigren-Kristoferson 2021: 2). Bender (2017: para. 1 line 2) viewed these collective efforts as having the potential to drive sustainable change in entire systems. Such efforts aimed at holistic, systemic changes assume paramount importance in the context of challenges, which span geopolitical and disciplinary boundaries (Edgell and Lee 2023: 2). In this light, redressing such challenges requires an amalgamation of creative ideas, emerging from collectives comprising diverse

constituents (Edgell and Lee 2023: 2). Here, the latter use their knowledge, experience and skill to stimulate action and collectively envision a novel conception of human development for resolving problems and realizing potential opportunities (Edgell and Lee 2023: 2).

In this light, Peterson (2013, cited in Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 393) viewed multi-stakeholder engagement as also providing legitimacy to co-created knowledge; being based on shared responsibility, and resulting in system innovation and social learning. Similarly, Göransson, Donati and Wigren-Kristoferson (2021: 1) posited that such efforts, synergizing diverse energies contribute to social innovation as a means of tackling social problems. Such an innovation emerges as a response to social challenges and entails alternate ways of knowing, doing, framing and organizing for contributing to a sustainable society (Göransson, Donati and Wigren-Kristoferson 2021: 1). This is in turn is based on social learning; a circular and a cross-boundary process, integrating diverse perspectives for addressing the complexities of the problems and better developing incremental solutions for the same (Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 393; Parsons et al. 2016, cited in Murphy *et al.* 2022: 530). Providing an example of the same in the North American context, Fitzgerald (2014: 256) asserted that the resolution of societal challenges required a collective community of actors and institutions to come together to co-create innovations across multiple contexts, such as education, healthcare, livelihoods etc.

In line with these ideas, Kania and Kramer (2011, cited in DePrince and DiEnno 2019: 22) proposed the concept of ‘collective impact’ referring to collectivized commitment of actors from different sectors for solving the wicked problems in the community. This is based on the argument that community level social change, is more likely to occur when individuals and organizations worked together towards a common agenda, rather than in isolation (Kania and Kramer 2011, cited in DePrince and DiEnno 2019: 22). Further, the UNESCO report of 2021 also endorsed similar views as it called for global cooperation in research and innovation, underpinned by values of integrity and equitable access, for building collective responses to the contemporary grand challenges (UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC 2021: 38). Positioning these ideas in the context of SDGs, the UNESCO report of 2022 also advocated for addressing the evolving societal challenges in partnerships, and in collaboration between disciplinary

fields and diverse institutions (both private and public) at local, national and international levels (UNESCO 2022: 7).

### 1.2.3 Paradigmatic shifts in the perceived value of knowledge and relevance of higher education institutions

Knowledge and its development have always had important implications both on the survival and the continuing development of mankind (Fredman 2021: 11). Accordingly, questions on the creation, cultures and traditions of knowledge have intrigued scholars and philosophers since historical times (Tandon *et al.* 2016: 20). In this context, Escrigas *et al.* (2014: xxxiii) referred to knowledge as being created through research or being manifested in the experience of the wise and entailing information about the world and the ways to interact with it. However, the pertinent question in the present context, is the relation between knowledge and the contemporary societal dynamics (Tandon *et al.* 2016: 20). Accordingly, in the face of global crises challenging human capacities to cope and respond, attention has shifted to the value of alternative forms of knowledge (Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 6). In this vein, Escrigas *et al.* (2014: xxxiv) asserted that there is a need to link multiple areas of knowledge that are complementary for dealing with complex problems and finding solutions in the local and global context. UNESCO (2015: 11), while positioning knowledge as a common good, highlighted that the creation of knowledge, as well as its acquisition, validation and use, are common to all people as part of collective societal endeavour. This assumes increased importance in the quest for sustainable development in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world, which necessitates the need to consider new knowledge horizons (UNESCO 2015: 21). Here, Kohl and Hopkins (2021: 355) emphasized that improved understanding and learning to cope with the world we live in, is essential for finding solutions for the grand challenges of today and tomorrow. Further, Mongkhonvanit, Rukspollmaung and Sawheny (2021: 347) added that since all the SDGs base their argument on knowledge, there is a need to rethink the new meaning of knowledge and the benefit of multi-disciplinary collaboration and cooperation for public welfare.

In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) as the primary knowledge producers and disseminators, have emerged as a key actor/institution in the society (Singh 2020: 17; Semerena 2021: 321). Reflecting on the role of HEI's, Higgins (2012,

cited in McIlrath 2014: 39) added that with the capacity to produce and the privilege to pursue knowledge, comes the responsibility to apply that knowledge to serve humanity. Further, this also becomes important considering the extraordinary breadth of knowledge across different disciplines in HEI's; which are key for generating new knowledge, tools and practices for exploring reality and addressing complex problems (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxviii; Göransson, Donati and Wigren-Kristoferson 2021: 2). Similarly, Damme (2021: 437) opined that at a time when the world is undergoing disruptive changes, HEI's, with their knowledge, skill and wisdom; find themselves at the centre of humanity's hope for sustainable social development. Accordingly, they are called upon to respond to the current and most importantly, the challenges of tomorrow amidst a constantly changing world order (Luppi *et al.* 2021: 255). This role and function of HEI's was described as its social responsibility in the conference communique of the UNESCO World Conference of Higher Education in 2009 (UNESCO 2009: 1). It stated that 'faced with the complexity of current and future global challenges, higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues and our ability to respond to them' (UNESCO 2009: 2). In a similar vein, Mongkhonvanit, Rukspollmaung and Sawheny (2021: 348) also reflected on the duties and social responsibilities of the global academic community to engage with global challenges and contribute to social transformation efforts.

However, the escalating socio-economic inequalities and challenges has led to an increasing recognition that academic knowledge, though necessary, is insufficient for addressing the broad range of social challenges alone (Lepore and King 2023: 58). This links with the earlier arguments on the failure of unilateral approaches to bring about positive social change, which necessitates the integration of multi-lateral and diverse perspectives. Therefore, the future of education and development in today's world requires fostering dialogue among multiple stakeholders, from a transdisciplinary perspective for integrating knowledge systems, rooted in diverse realities (UNESCO 2015: 31). Supporting these ideas, Fitzgerald (2014: 256) asserted that community change calls for a broader conceptualization of community of scholars; one that recognizes non-academic experiential knowledge as being equally important as academic knowledge for successfully addressing social problems. Accordingly, there has been an increase in efforts aimed at integrating citizens local knowledge in

academic research approaches, while also balancing natural and social science research paradigms (Carlson 2019: para. 9 line 4). Tremblay, Singh and Lepore (2017: 392) referred to this as 'democratic knowledge partnerships', which combines community action and academic knowledge for achieving social transformation, which the narrow application of university scientific knowledge cannot achieve.

On similar lines, Purcell (2019: 247) posited that addressing 21st century wicked problems, call for a collaborative approach, which taps into the broad talent pool inside and outside the campus, building on dialogue and collective action. Therefore, HEI's need to see themselves as part of a greater network of stakeholders, where interactions and knowledge management goes beyond the traditional, unilateral paradigms (Corazza and Saluto 2021: 1173). This is linked to the need to 'reset' knowledge within a public knowledge common, which enables sharing of knowledge in intersectional contexts, between academic and non-academic actors (Tandon and Hall 2021: 301). It is here that knowledge plays a transformative and active role in achieving public welfare and for the common, shared good (Tandon and Hall 2021: 301). These arguments find support in the work of many scholars such as Burman (2019: 199), who illustrated a research partnership between a university and the local community, which successfully built resilience and addressed intractable wicked problems. Similarly, Parthasarathy, Dey and Gupta (2021: 8) argued that the research or innovation agenda in universities must be co-produced with a variety of stakeholders. Such external stakeholders like Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can de-mystify the demand side information, while also clarifying ill-formulated social system problems (Parthasarathy, Dey and Gupta 2021: 8).

Therefore, knowledge creation for system innovation translates into a process of engagement between university researchers and non-academic actors, who have traditionally been outside the knowledge production systems (Tremblay, Singh and Lepore 2017: 393). This transforms the way knowledge is produced, as it builds on a two-way learning process that redefines conventional research practices through dialogues with other forms of knowledge(s) (Flores *et al.* 2023: 152). This in turn contributes to reimagining education in non-linear ways, while preparing higher education to be better equipped to respond to *'glocal'* crises such as pandemics, migration, conflict etc. (UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC 2021: 44). Mirroring similar

ideas, Patwardhan and Mittal (2020: 15) affirmed that HEI's, through adopting transdisciplinary approaches and integrating traditional and modern knowledge systems can become locally and globally relevant and serve the cause of human development. Education, must therefore, find ways to respond to global challenges, taking into account multiple worldviews and alternate knowledge systems (UNESCO 2015: 10). However, education alone cannot hope to solve all developmental challenges (UNESCO 2015: 10). Therefore, a humanistic and holistic approach to education is needed, which (i) integrates multiple dimensions of human existence; (ii) critically engages with scholarship, institutions and people; and, (iii) contributes to developing a new model for human development (UNESCO 2015: 10).

### 1.2.4 Going beyond the third mission of higher education and the growing discourse on community engagement in global academia

The preceding section shed light on the increased attention on the role of education and the public purpose of HEI's in addressing the challenges of the century. On similar lines, Jacques Delors, in a report to UNESCO, titled '*Learning: The Treasure Within'* heralded education as the principal means to achieve social transformation and sustainable human development (Delors 1996: 11; Didham and Ofei-Manu 2018: 89). This renewed focus on the public welfare role of higher education has put the spotlight back on what has traditionally been called as the 'third mission of higher education', which mainly relates to how HEI's relate to the communities, of which they are a part (Farnell 2020: 6; Davies 2023: 97). This renewed attention has been to the extent that the role played by HEI's in contemporary society is not only measured by its impact on education and research alone; but also, the extent to which it carries out its third mission (Grau *et al.* 2017b: 513). Broadly, the latter has been referred to as the social, economic and cultural interactions between the HEI's and its environment, for improving the community (Grau *et al.* 2017b: 513). Further, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 30), while stating that third mission activities have never been explicitly specified; agreed that it comprised of a broad range of activities ranging from those aimed at economic development to contributing to public discourse and cultural life.

Given this background, Farnell (2020: 12) noted that HEI's have always interacted with their surrounding societies and communities and therefore, its societal role, relevance and impact is not a new phenomenon. However, in view of the grand challenges, the

broader societal contribution of HEI's in addressing such challenges, catering to the needs of vulnerable groups, and informing public policy, has re-emerged as a policy priority, since the late 20th century onwards (Farnell 2020: 6). This has resulted in a re-conceptualization of the notion of the third mission which has come to include university activities contributing to societal impact, in cooperation with external stakeholders (Farnell 2020: 13). Therefore, as part of the third mission, HEI's have changed course from generative roles to more development roles (Gunasekara 2006, cited in Asheim 2017: 341). Generative roles refer to the provision of knowledge outputs and the development of scientific capabilities to create prototypes and products in response to business or public sector demands (Benneworth *et al.* 2009, cited in Asheim 2017: 341). On the other hand, in taking on development roles, universities interact more constructively with stakeholders, promoting holistic development and contributing to solving global challenges (Asheim 2017: 341). Farnell (2020: 12) captured this change accurately, as he described the distinction between previous and contemporary model of third mission activities; where the former focused more on HEI's as having benefits for the society, while the latter was built around its engagement with the society to deliver those benefits.

Therefore, the third mission policies and practices, which earlier overwhelmingly focused on the economic contribution of HEI's; is now seen as concentrating on the public welfare role of HEI's and its broader societal impact (Farnell and Ilic 2021: 253). This change in the trajectory of the third mission, has witnessed an increased emphasis being placed on the dialogues between science/academia and society (Predazzi 2012, cited in Berg 2021: 229). This has entailed broader engagement of HEI's with society for holistic human development, through an array of activities which includes technology transfer and innovation, continuing education and social engagement (E3M 2012, cited in Berg 2021: 229). Razak and Afendras (2014: 101) viewed this 'going beyond' of the third mission of HEI's, as having the potential to create new opportunities for research, innovation, learning and co-creating new knowledge(s). In this context, the aspect of knowledge diversity – comprising of all forms of knowledge, academic, non-academic, experiential, practical – is an important dimension shaping the new conceptualization of the third mission, as it stands today (Razak and Afendras 2014: 101).

Many scholars viewed such engagement as being a part of the third mission of universities (McIlrath 2014: 41; Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 23; Saidi and Boti 2023: 77). However, Hall and Tandon (2021: 4) went a step further from this, as they opined that what has historically been referred to as the third mission (tailing teaching and research as the first and second mission respectively) is now replaced by a new conception of 'engagement'. Engagement, in this context, entails activities and interactions that take place in the process of building partnerships between the universities and communities for accomplishing shared objectives (McIlrath 2014: 39; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 28). Building on such two-way collaborative approaches, engagement, then differs from the traditional notions of service and outreach, which entail linear approaches of knowledge and service delivery (similar to the generative roles taken up under the third mission, as discussed earlier) (Bhagwan 2017a: 316).

Accordingly, Grau *et al.* (2017a: 47) viewed 'engagement', as being beyond the limited understanding of the third mission or an outreach mandate; and as offering a transformative space for innovation, co-creation of knowledge and development of active citizenship at the local and the global levels. Appel *et al.* (2023: 465) referred to this as a 'fourth space' in higher education which features 'community engagement (CE)' as an intentional focus of higher education, one which is built on participatory problem solving, and is scaffolded by complex systems thinking. Such a perspective reflects a growing undertaking of HEI's to recognize their part in addressing contemporary social challenges and the transformative potential of co-creating solutions, in partnerships with the communities (Davies 2023: 97). Singh *et al.* (2023a: 5) added that CE as an approach has risen to prominence, primarily because of its ability to gauge issues of multiple stakeholders, thereby channelling diverse interests and multi-dimensional perspectives.

In simple words, CE refers to partnerships between universities and their external communities, which includes a diverse array of stakeholders such as public, business, and civil society to address societal needs (O'Brien *et al.* 2022: 816). Alternatively, Ruiz (2014: 44) viewed such partnerships as one of the most important forms of developing CE, that addresses social issues. As a process involving working with and through groups of people, CE emerges as a powerful vehicle for improving their quality of lives and addressing issues affecting their well-being (Rashid *et al.* 2023: 6).

DePrince and DiEnno (2019: 24) positioned CE as a method of teaching, learning, research and creative work, which channels university community partnerships for solving society's most pressing problems. Further, CE, by fostering deeper interactions between HEI's and communities for identifying and solving real life problems; also helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, making the former more relevant and the latter more informed (Mittal 2021: 198).

Education emerging from such democratic engagement results in multi-dimensional learnings which manifests in the form of enhanced knowledge, improved social awareness, development of core skills and competencies, resulting in civic action (Sabharwal and Malish 2016: 53; Dobson and Kirkpatrick 2017: 247). This links to the five pillars of education proposed by UNESCO (Delors 1996: 37; Didham and Ofei-Manu 2018: 90). They are: learning to know (acquiring instruments of understanding); learning to do (be able to act creatively in one's environment); learning to live together (cooperate with people in all human activities); learning to be (be able to act with greater autonomy, judgement and responsibility) and learning to transform oneself and society (to empower people and create a sustainable future) (Delors 1996: 37; Didham and Ofei-Manu 2018: 90). Summing up the essence of the practice, Chang *et al.* (2020: 712) described CE as being instrumental in managing and solving complex problems, through the generation of frontier intellectual knowledge, and in doing so, trains and prepares students for effective service to the society. Therefore, CE offers a powerful method for transformational change for elevating the public purpose of HEI's (DePrince and DiEnno 2019: 24).

### 1.2.5 Knowledge, learning and social development; the intricacies and synergy in the Indian context

In light of the background presented, and with the present study focusing on the Indian context; a discussion on India and its rich educational history is much pertinent. Ancient Indian education with its long milieu of history and as a rich source of evolving knowledge, has not only been a centre of global learning, but has always been oriented towards the global well-being of mankind in all respects (Dutta 2020: 172; Patwardhan and Mittal 2020: 15). This rich heritage of ancient Indian education system was considered as a source of knowledge, traditions and practices that steered the '*summum bonum'* of humanity, which commanded respect in the ancient world (Bhatt

*et al.* 2023: 157). Further, this ancient Indian education was exclusively characterized by the existence of a *Gurukul* system, where the students served the society under the guidance of the teacher (guru) and acquired value education (Patwardhan and Mittal 2020: 16). Such teaching pedagogy not only imparted education for life, but also developed the requisite skills in the students, for serving the society (Chandwani 2019, cited in Kumari and Sharma 2021: 153).

Therefore, apart from teaching and research, engagement with communities for societal development has always been a central element of Indian higher education, and has had a deep impact on the development of early societies (Singh and Tandon 2015: 114; Panwar 2020: 41; Mittal 2021: 197). Such engaged philosophies for social development were also seen to be embedded in ancient Indian HEI's such as Takshila and Nalanda (some of the oldest HEI's in human civilization), which placed tremendous importance on its relationship with the community and functioned in sync with nature and society, for serving its requirements (Singh and Tandon 2015: 114; Mittal 2021: 197). Further, such institutions, built on the mission of community service and set up with extensive community support; witnessed many students and faculty returning to their communities for engaging with them and serving them (Tandon 2008: 12; Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 197). Such an education imparted by traditional Indian HEI's, rooted in society and sustainability, epitomized its holistic nature, which had a far-reaching welfarist impact on mankind (Dutta 2020: 173).

These ideas on education have also been reiterated by prominent Indian educationists like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore, who laid out the critical underpinnings connecting the role of Indian higher education in shaping societies and its sustainable futures (Sharma and Singh 2019: 43; Panwar 2020: 42; Anand 2021: 204; Mittal 2021: 197; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). Therefore, education in India has always been viewed as a means for social transformation and social change, as it integrated academic knowledge and skills with social priorities (Singh and Tandon 2015: 114; Sabharwal and Malish 2016: 25). Further, even Indian education commissions from pre-independence to post independence era have all emphasized the close interlinkages between education and society and the need for students to be aware of social issues (Singh and Tandon 2015: 114; Sabharwal and Malish 2016: 25).

However, this rich history and cultural heritage of Indian education system, suffered a significant dent, due to invasions, conquests and colonial rule, which led to the erosion of the core ethos of the traditional Indian education system (Patwardhan and Mittal 2020: 16). The colonial system of education (under the British rule) in particular, replaced the traditional Indian knowledge systems with western epistemologies and practices (Shankar 2021: 82). This was mainly the result of the colonial creation and perpetuation of the myth which positioned traditionality and modernity as opposites, and worse, even discredited the traditional knowledge systems (Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 198; Shankar 2021: 83). This changed the core objective of university education in India from a value-based scholarship to the production of an assembly line of graduates as a workforce for serving in economic establishments (Patwardhan and Mittal 2020: 17). This alienation of Indian intellectual content with Indian society's roots, resulted in further weakening the connection between HEI's and the society (Shankar 2021: 79).

These historical changes were exacerbated by more contemporary developments, which brought along a trend of commercialization of education and commodification of knowledge (Tandon 2008: 4; Singh 2017: 2; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). The summative impact of all these developments has been the transition from a value-based education to an educational system, characterized by power, position, regulations and business-like practices (Singh 2017: 2; Patwardhan and Mittal 2020: 17). Making matters worse is the fact that these changes causing foundational shifts in Indian education system came at a time when the country is facing multi-dimensional challenges, impacting various facets of human development (Singh 2020: 14; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). Among such challenges, pertinent ones relate problems of inequality, deprivation, poverty, unemployment, marginalization, conflict and violence etc. (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 6; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). With such challenges remaining unaddressed despite advancement in higher education and massification of HEI's in India; the missing link here was traced to the weakened engagement of HEI's with society and issues of social development (Tandon 2014: 4; UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 6).

This has resulted in questions being raised with regards to the social relevance and credibility of Indian HEI's and purpose of education imparted, in lieu of their role as a public good and primary knowledge producers and disseminators (Singh 2017: 2).

Therefore, similar to the global developments, the focus once again has shifted back on Indian education system and HEI's, coupled with increasingly calls for the latter to reclaim its role in social development, while fostering social transformation and nation-building (Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). The most prominent driver of this change in narrative has emerged from the Indian higher education policy sector, which through the last decade has made several attempts to push this agenda into mainstream higher education discourse (Singh and Tandon 2015: 115; Singh 2020: 20; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 159). The most salient among the policy push has been the National Education Policy of 2020 (NEP 2020) which envisions an Indian education system, built on an ethos of social engagement, and which contributes directly to transforming India into a sustainable, equitable and vibrant knowledge society (MHRD 2020: 6; Patwardhan, Mittal and Batra 2021: 1).

## 1.3 Problem statement and rationale of the study

Against the aforementioned backdrop presented above, it can be argued that India presents itself as a unique amalgamation of challenges and opportunities. This section primarily focuses on these aspects as it makes the case for this doctoral research study as unique, exciting and a timely one. While India stands at a critical juncture today; it is gradually emerging as an active player, whose role will be crucial in shaping up global development agendas in the future (Singh 2020: 13; 2021: 117). Even in the context of SDGs, India is one of those critical countries, where achievement of the goals will be essential for realizing the global 2030 agenda (Tandon and Pandey 2019: 47). However, this will depend on how India as a nation, overcomes its challenges and converts them into opportunities (Singh 2020: 13). India, like the rest of the world, emerging from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, faces a huge human development challenge, as it ranks an unenviable 132 out of 191 countries (UNDP 2022: 26). In terms of the commitment to reduce inequality index, it secures a low rank of 123 out of 161 countries (Walker *et al.* 2022: 55). Further, another aspect of concern is India ranking 112 out of 166 countries on the 2023 SDG index (Sachs *et al.* 2023: 26).

In light of these challenges, several contemporary opportunities have important implications, within the context under discussion. *First*, India's demographic dividends entails an increasing pool of young student population. As a result, India is well poised

to become the largest provider of human resources in the world, with 24.3 percent of the incremental work force coming from India in the next decade (Ernst & Young India 2023: para. 2 line 1). *Second*, the massive Indian higher education sector, which is the second largest in the world, and houses this enormous pool of young graduates; will play an important role in nurturing future change makers and nation builders (Altbach 2022: para. 3 line 1). This makes the role of HEI's in the Indian context even more crucial (Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). This is because ensuring inclusive and sustainable development requires new knowledge and enhanced human capacities; a role primarily entrusted with HEI's (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 6). This is also in line with its role as a public good, with exclusive social responsibilities for producing knowledge for sustainable social development (Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 196). Further, with their enormous physical, financial and intellectual resources, and most importantly, the enormous pool of youthful energy; Indian HEI's have an important role to play in mobilizing future generations to make a positive societal contribution (Tandon 2017: 5; Tandon and Pandey 2019: 53).

Accordingly, several authors in the Indian context have advocated in favour of making CE an essential part of Indian education processes and HEI's; which can provide the platform for achieving the desired objectives (Jadhav and Suhalka 2016: 27; Mohan and Bhushan 2017: 321; Mittal 2021: 198; Shankar 2021: 79; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158; Mundra and Gupta 2023: 261; Panwar 2023: 222). Further, Kavatekar and Vijaya (2017b: 25) argued that Indian HEI's, in order to be socially relevant, need to embed CE in their teaching pedagogies. This will not only bring about behavioural changes amongst their students, but also transform their perspectives and build competencies essential to address the complexities in an ever-changing world (Kavatekar and Vijaya 2017b: 27). This assertion was supported by Joseph and Jacob (2021: 115), who argued in favour of CE being included as an integral component of HEI's, in lieu of its potential to catalyse attitudinal change among youth and utilize their untapped energy for nation building purposes. Further, Bhatnagar *et al.* (2020: 20) emphasized that mutual learning between Indian HEI's and community will have critical implications for the development of a nation, and therefore, a scholarly approach to CE is essential to achieve the former objectives. Summing up the ideas, Panwar (2023: 222) posited that in the contemporary scenario, Indian HEI's cannot afford to work in isolation and

need to invest in building networks and engaging with different stakeholders for community welfare and social development.

However, despite the increasing calls for inclusion of CE into the teaching-learning (T-L) processes at Indian HEI's; this area has been fraught with gaps and inadequacies. Here, it is important to note that the narrative of 'social responsibility of HEI's and CE in higher education' in India is not new and has been in the public discourse for almost a decade now. It first gained visibility when the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017) promoted the ideas of engagement and social responsibility (Planning Commission 2013: 111). Under the plan directives, the then Planning Commission (now, known as the Niti Aayog), constituted a sub-committee for strengthening CE in Indian HEI's in August 2011, which provided articulate recommendations on the same (Planning Commission 2011: 1). Post this development, several fresh schemes/programs were launched in the country to give impetus to this area of work. Two important ones is this context were: *firstly*, the XII$^{th}$ plan guidelines on establishing centres for fostering social responsibility and community engagement in universities (launched by the University Grants Commission (UGC)) in 2014 and, *secondly*, the Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan (launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development) in the same year, mandating Indian HEI's to address rural development challenges and devise solutions for accelerating sustainable growth (UGC 2014: 2; Press Information Bureau 2016: para. 1 line 1). However, neither of them could gain momentum (Panwar 2020: 42).

As a result of this, both the theory and the practice of CE in Indian HEI's remained weak. Panwar (2020: 41) and Kavatekar and Vijaya (2017a: 15) supported this argument as they highlighted that, while there is an abundance of global research studies on CE in higher education; not many have been conducted in the Indian context. In terms of CE practice, Tandon (2014: 7) and Kavatekar (2022: 1811) pointed out that while assorted practices of CE continue in local contexts, the gaps remain in the systematization, mapping and analysis of such experiences. Further, Shankar (2021: 79) observed that in the absence of concrete strategies in terms of 'how to connect' universities and societies, the engagement between the two has remained weak and fragmented. He added that the alienation of the intellectual content of higher education from Indian societal roots, due to the disproportionate emphasis on western

pedagogy of abstract learning, has further contributed towards limiting engagement to a peripheral and expendable activity at Indian HEI's (Shankar 2021: 80).

This weak theory and practice of CE has resulted in ambiguous understanding of the same, with it being referred to as 'new age models of social outreach' (FICCI 2017: 6); university-society connect (Shankar 2021: 79), etc. This was mirrored in the findings emerging from a pan India study conducted by the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, on strengthening CE in Indian HEI's, which pointed towards the gaps in the conceptualization and institutionalization of CE in Indian HEI's (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 13). Despite almost a decade after this study, no supporting or follow-up empirical research of such a scale was conducted in the Indian context, which further contributed towards the lack of momentum in this area of work, which continued to be assorted and boxed. As a result, systematization and standard benchmarking of CE in the Indian context is still missing, as pointed out by Tandon (2014: 7). This has mainly been because the documentation of practices has been limited to individual HEI's, outlining the operationalization and benefits of practicing CE in the local contexts, in an assorted manner (Jadhav and Suhalka 2016: 24; Kavatekar and Vijaya 2017a: 13; Panwar 2020: 39; Mittal 2021: 201).

The lack of concerted and dedicated efforts to understand this area of work from a holistic perspective, especially in terms of the 'practical modus-operandi' of CE with respect to the higher education functions of teaching, research and service; and its institutionalization, has resulted in the CE context in India to lag behind. A direct impact of this has been that the literature on this topic, in the Indian context, remains sketchy and fragmented. Further, this has also meant that a major platform for social development in the form of CE is going unused, despite the immense human and institutional resources in the Indian academia. This has enormous implications in contemporary times, especially in the face of the magnanimous challenges that India faces, with respect to its development discourse. With much potential of CE in Indian HEI's remaining unexplored and untapped for want of meaningful studies to demystify the practice to facilitate its practical operationalization, it can be said that India is risking a huge opportunity loss.

Further, considering that the policy directives supporting the CE agenda (such as NEP 2020) are still new and that India is its infancy in terms of the stages of its CE journey; while there are some good examples, there is still much ground to cover to parallel the advanced scholarships in the field of CE being practiced globally (Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 164). Viewing the Indian scenario within the broad context as presented above, makes it more challenging, exciting and one which holds tremendous potential for exploration and focused empirical studies in this area of work. Therefore, this background makes a strong case to approach this area of work of embedding CE in Indian HEI's, with more conviction and commitment. This study intends to be the first step in this direction. Along with attempting to fill the gap in the literature on the conceptualization, institutionalization, and operationalization of CE in the Indian context; it also seeks to situate this body of knowledge, in the broader framework of the new policy directives for coherence and aligned implementation. In doing so, it is expected that the study will play an important role in guiding and strengthening the CE framework in the Indian higher educational context in the coming future.

## 1.4 Understanding the framework of community engagement in higher education

### 1.4.1 Conceptualization of community engagement

One of the earliest and most authentic conceptualizations of CE was provided by Dr Ernest Boyer, a former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer 1990: 16). He asserted that HEI's need to situate their role of knowledge generation in a larger context, not only in terms of its application, but also in directing that work towards more humane ends, by rigorously engaging with the issues of the day (Boyer 1996: 28). He situated these functions within the four types of scholarship(s) of discovery, integration, application and teaching. This conception of CE, therefore, refers to a set of activities undertaken by HEI's, which are focused towards socio-economic development of communities, and which helps them reaffirm their relevance to the society (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008: 313). This new kind of engagement builds on the understanding that addressing the complex and multi-disciplinary social issues will require specialized knowledge and expertise of the academia and the practical wisdom residing in community settings (Fitzgerald *et al.*

2012: 11). Accordingly, the Carnegie Foundation defined CE in terms of collaborative partnerships between HEI's and their larger communities for mutual exchange of knowledge and resources, in the context of partnerships and reciprocity (Driscoll 2009: 6).

However, Dube and Hendricks (2023: 148) noted that different academics view CE differently, ranging from a scholarship of engagement to skill transfer to the community, to service learning, or sustainable community problem solving. Nkoana and Dichaba (2017: 193) differentiated between these varied understandings of CE as weak CE and strong CE. While weak CE comprised of community service and outreach programs; strong CE was characterized by collaboration and reciprocity between academics and community members (Nkoana and Dichaba 2017: 193). Similarly, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 62) viewed outreach and partnership as two different, but related approaches to CE, where the former focused on provision of institutional resources for community benefit, while the latter builds on collaborative interactions with the community for mutual benefit. Therefore, CE may be understood in various ways, resulting in wide variety of activities and theoretical models (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 9). Further, while Hutson *et al.* (2019: 4) agreed that CE is used as an umbrella term for different campus-community endeavours; they concurred that the most accepted definition emerged from the Carnegie Foundation, which focussed on mutuality, reciprocity and transformation. Similar views were proposed by Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell (2017: 81) who argued that despite the non-uniformity in its conceptualization, authentic CE is more aligned with the technical definition proposed by the Carnegie Foundation, which positioned CE as activities done with a community, rather than to, or for a community (as seen in service or outreach approaches).

Therefore, at its core, CE refers to the mutual relations between HEI's and the communities, one where there is a shared understanding in terms of what is to be done and the goals/objectives sought, in a way that both parties gain from the collaboration (Petter 2017: 432; Thakrar 2018: 674). Accordingly, it is characterized by a new approach to knowledge co-creation, within the context of partnership, collaboration and knowledge exchange (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 245; Renwick *et al.* 2020: 1238). This has implied a shift from a one-way, to a two-way model, with

universities connecting with communities and engaging for change (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 126; Bhagwan 2017b: 178). This has signalled how campus-community partnerships have transitioned from providing a service, to being an ally (Yep and Mitchell 2017: 300). This has enabled HEI's to work collaboratively with the community for making an effective contribution to societal problems through joint public problem solving, thereby driving wider change and system innovation (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 33; Symaco and Tee 2019: 191; Ohmer *et al.* 2022: 82). Therefore, the objective of CE, co-defined by academic and community partners, involves supporting and advancing holistic and sustainable social development, by way of HEI's working in tandem with local communities (Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy 2022: 120; Nicolaides and Austin 2022: 186). This results in numerous benefits such as achieving positive social change (Chandramohan and Bhagwan 2022: 200), local community capacity building (Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 9); social justice (Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy 2022: 114), while also enhancing student learning outcomes (Dickens *et al.* 2023: 63).

### 1.4.2 Institutionalization of community engagement

In terms of academic organizations, institutionalization entails a successful diffusion of an idea or practice across the institution, which involves moving the practice from the margins to the core, in a way that it is no longer considered as peripheral (Holland 2009: 85). In terms of CE, Furco (2014: 264) posited that institutionalization of the same requires an intentional agenda for embedding it into the academic culture and everyday functions. However, Sandmann, Furco and Adams (2016: 8), while reflecting on contemporary approaches for institutionalizing CE; noticed a shift from embedding CE within higher education systems, towards transforming the latter itself, which embraces CE as a core value. This requires grounding of CE, deep into the institutional culture, structure, and, operational values; along with a change in mindset which views CE as an interwoven key element of core academic functions, rather than a peripheral activity (Sandmann 2008, cited in Furco 2014: 264; Zizka, McGunagle and Clark 2021: 1; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 239). This needs to be complemented with institutional readiness for structural transformation for establishing CE structures, fulfilling community-facing commitments in terms of re-assessment of institutional

practices for enhancing civic engagement, and acceptance by all higher education stakeholders (Adarlo *et al.* 2022: 82; Ohmer *et al.* 2022: 82).

Achievement of such an institutional transformation directed towards institutionalizing CE requires an array of efforts across multiple tangents (Kearney 2015: 33). This includes embedding CE in mission statements and strategic plans, coupled with a practical framework for implementing such plans; developing a shared understanding on CE, and most importantly, valuing, recognizing and rewarding CE (Kearney 2015: 33; Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann 2021: 12). Consequently, Dickens *et al.* (2023: 68) and McGeough, Leitch and McGeough (2022: 12) argued for a strategic approach to be adopted, which can create a culture of engagement, one which prioritizes and values CE. However, such approaches can be uniquely tailored for each institution, indicating that different models of institutionalization can be adopted, based on the priorities, policies, practices and philosophies of HEI's (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 66; Tijsma, Urias and Zweekhorst 2023: 161).

Notwithstanding the approaches adopted, many scholars have argued that the institutionalization process is a phased one, beginning from an initial stage (where CE is placed at the periphery), followed by the traversing of various trajectories before achieving full institutionalization (where CE is positioned as a central institutional practice) (Furco *et al.* 2009: 1; Hutson *et al.* 2019: 6; Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan 2019: 23; Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann 2021: 15; Tijsma, Urias and Zweekhorst 2023: 143). However, a point to be noted here is that the institutionalization process moves in phases, and is often non-linear; involving series of loops and overlaps between different phases, and builds on expertise, sufficient deliberation and consensus building (Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann 2021: 13; Shankar 2021: 88; Tijsma, Urias and Zweekhorst 2023: 159). As a result, such an institutionalization process can be lengthy, complex and messy (Farner 2019: 150; Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann 2021: 3). This is also because it involves a long-term institutional socialization process, akin to a generational shift, involving new approaches to teaching, learning, research; along with the investment of time, resources and space for individual experimentation (Weerts and Sandmann 2008: 97; Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 39; Farnell 2020: 51).

Therefore, the process of institutionalizing CE at HEI's, requires dedicated commitment from the institution and its leadership, in creating enabling institutional conditions that facilitates the engagement of academics in CE processes (Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma 2022: 609). This is because excellence in engagement is embedded in institutional strategies, systems, processes and culture (Osborne, Mayo and Bussey 2021: 6). Therefore, Klentzin and WierzbowskiKwiatkowski (2013, cited in Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247) added that institutionalization of CE is not about fitting CE into the existing higher education processes or practices, but transforming the culture of higher education itself, in a way that it embraces the epistemologies and scholarship which enables CE to thrive. If this can be achieved, institutionalization of CE can lead to multiple other benefits, such as fostering conversations on CE across diverse disciplines, faculty and students; thereby amplifying the impact of engaged pedagogies and practices across and beyond the institution (Houston and Lange 2018: 56).

### 1.4.3 Operationalization of community engagement

In order for HEI's to nurture ethical, innovative, active and global citizens; a transformative approach to teaching and learning scholarship is required, one which moves beyond classroom-based theory (Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 111). Engagement must therefore manifest across all three core functions of HEI's, namely, teaching, research and service (September-Brown, Daniels and Hart 2023: 267). In lieu of this, engagement is not a substitute for professional service, but a way of carrying out teaching, research and service functions in and with the community, through the incorporation of civic focused initiatives into each one of them (Furco 2010: 383; Thomson *et al.* 2011: 220). Engaged teaching involves engagement of students with the curriculum and the outside world, through multi-modal pedagogies, in addition to classroom and laboratories (FICCI 2017: 11). Engaged research entails using the research function of HEI's, for addressing community problems and contributing towards the holistic socio-economic development of the communities (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 64). Further, engaged service views the function of service and outreach from an engaged lens, where assisting community and community-based agencies on pressing issues is viewed as valuable, beneficial and important for the advancement of HEI's and its stakeholders (Furco 2010: 386).

Such curricular engagement, therefore, engages faculty, students and communities for addressing community identified needs, and deepens students civic and academic learning, in turn enriching the teaching and research function of HEI's (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 62). The transformative learning emerging as a result of linking CE with the academic functions of teaching, research and service, collectively represents the Scholarship of Engagement (SoE) (Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 228); a term popularly attributed to Dr Ernest Boyer (Boyer 1990: 16; Welch 2016: 44). In this framework, SoE is not a separate activity, but infused within the core academic functions (September-Brown, Daniels and Hart 2023: 267). This engaged scholarship perspective dismantles the barriers between theory and practice, by connecting classroom and course material with the immediate communities and their context, thus creating a multi-directional discourse (Benz *et al.* 2020: 29; Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 113). This, then facilitates the engagement of learners with what they are learning, which in turn leads to internalization and transformation (Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 114).

Accordingly, Calleson, Jordan and Seifer (2005, cited in Bender 2008: 85) described SoE as encompassing an array of activities undertaken by academics in partnership with the community – through teaching (service-learning, practice-based learning), research (community-based participatory research) and service (community service, outreach and advocacy). Therefore, engaged scholarship can be said to be created and communicated through discovery, development, application, dissemination and preservation of new knowledge (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 13; Franz 2009, cited in Denny 2018: 9). Accordingly, the Kellogg Commission (1999, cited in Hall 2009: 16) proposed a shift from the terms teaching, research and service to learning, discovery and engagement. Similarly, Tandon (2017: 6) argued for changing the emphasis of the teaching function, to one of catalysing learning, and shifting the research function to knowledge generation, and transforming the service function to mutual empowerment. Proposing a related, but unique view on this aspect, Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong (2021: 4) viewed the three functions of HEI's, as teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, which intersect and collaborate with each other. These functions also reinforce each other, enabling the consolidation of academic scholarship, for fulfilling social and civic responsibilities (Terevova and Sabolova 2010, cited in Tshishonga 2022: 902).

Hurd and Stanton (2022: 877) viewed this as a community development approach to CE, involving a full range of community engaged teaching, learning, research, and service activities, co-created with community for co-ordinated and sustained action. In this view, all three functions have some social and interactive components which position CE as a key priority area (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 4). Farnell (2020: 12) supported this view as he stated that teaching and research are often inherently societal in character. This is because, students, post their higher education enter professions and occupations that correspond to societal needs; while research creates new knowledge for developing new solutions for solving social problems (Farnell 2020: 12). Therefore, the embedment of CE into the traditional functions of HEI's necessitates transformation, which is articulated through a new set of teaching, learning and research frameworks, resulting in the development of concomitant attributes and critical competencies in students (Rajah 2019: 2). Finally, engaged teaching, learning and research approaches not only helps students become knowledgeable and active citizens (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 2); but the triad of teaching and learning, research, and CE, accelerates learning outcomes for students, researchers, and community stakeholders as well (Van Eeden, Eloff and Dippenaar 2021: 10).

### 1.4.4 Community engagement in higher education: A global perspective

CE in its present form, and the increased importance accorded to it in global academia, has been shaped through a series of developments (Singh *et al.* 2023a: 4). Here, while HEI's in the global North, have been leading the discourse, those from the global South have lagged behind, indicating different levels of maturity in different countries and regions, with respect to the embedment of CE in higher education (Singh *et al.* 2023a: 4). The global North, especially the North American higher education context, is the one where CE is believed to have originated, dating back to the establishment of land grant universities in 1862, which responded to the local needs of agricultural communities (Farnell 2020: 14). Additionally, Latin America, where social responsibility has been a central feature of HEI's for more than a century, owing to widespread decolonization and revolutionary movements, have also contributed to the global CE agenda (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 22; Farnell 2020: 14). Accordingly, scholarly inputs from American academicians, have played a crucial role in shaping

the global CE agenda, especially since the 1990s, which led to defining and outlining the characteristics of the practice (Boyer 1996: 19; Furco 2010: 377; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 13; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 245; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 14).

This coincided with similar developments in the Canadian context around the same time (in the 1990s), with the creation of the Community University Research Alliances (CURA), which laid the foundations of engaged scholarship practices in Canada (Brown *et al.* 2015: 96). This was however, preceded by earlier debates and discussions (in the period ranging from 1940s to 1950s) led by the Canadian Association of University Continuing Education, on the relationships between education and public welfare (Hall 2009: 12). The engagement era in Canada, however, began post 2012, when David Johnston, the then governor general of Canada, called on universities and communities to become close partners, in the process of the production and application of knowledge (Brown *et al.* 2015: 96). Providing similar leadership towards strengthening the CE discourse, in a more contemporary perspective is the European continent, where the European Union (EU) 2020 strategy, was drafted in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crises, and which paved the way for entry of social development objectives into higher education policies (Farnell 2020: 16). Further, the renewed agenda for higher education, drafted by the European Commission in 2017, EU's horizon 2020 framework for research and innovation, and the establishment of institutional CE structures like the Science Shops in various European HEI's, have played a key role in prioritizing societal engagement by HEI's (Farnell 2020: 16; McKenna 2023: 72).

In terms of the global South, different countries have followed the trends emerging in the global North, and which have also been shaped by developments in their own contexts. South Africa, for instance, being driven by the policy documents drafted by the Department of Education (in the late 90s and early 2000s), established the three functions of HEI's as teaching, research, and CE, and called for renewed relationships between HEI's and communities (Padayachee, Lortan and Maistry 2021: 33; Bhagwan and Rowkith 2023: 110). The establishment of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum in 2009, provided further momentum for the discourse of CE in the country (Hoyt and Hollister 2014: 132). However, since then, several South African scholars have voiced their opinion with regards to the challenges of CE

implementation such as lack of funding, absence of clear conceptualization and minimal evidence of tangible impact, despite the resounding policy support (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 3; Padayachee, Lortan and Maistry 2021: 33; Sathorar and Geduld 2021: 91; Bhagwan and Rowkith 2023: 111). Similar developments were observed in the Australian context, where the establishment of Engagement Australia (formerly known as the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA)), as an independent legal entity, was seen as a major driver facilitating and popularizing the CE discourse in the country (Hoyt and Hollister 2014: 133). This was supported by the Bradley review of the Australian higher education sector, which argued for CE to be a third and separate stream of funding, in lieu of higher education's social and economic contributions (Murphy and McGrath 2018: 323). However, challenges in this context pertained to the overt bias favouring commercial and economic outcomes; with social, environmental and cultural objectives being accorded less importance in policy endorsements with respect to CE (Peacock 2012: 322; Murphy and McGrath 2018: 325).

The CE discourse in the Asian region has been a relatively new development. One of the earliest scholarly works in this context came from Hok Ka Ma and Tandon (2014: 197), who pointed out that as a region characterized by rapid urbanization, staggering economic and technological advancements and also stark inequalities; the development of CE in higher education in Asia became more pertinent. Further, through a study focused on university social responsibility activities in the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) context, Symaco and Tee (2019: 186), noted that as the region strives for growth beyond economic development; slow emergence of the concepts of social responsibility and the role of HEI's in sustainable development has been observed. Significant among these has been Indonesia and Malaysia, where CE has emerged in the higher education discourse, as observed from the global CE literature. While the former has led the way in this regard, owing to a robust national policy on CE, mandating the practice in all HEI's (Wardhani and Asri 2015: 133; Naily *et al.* 2023: 84); Malaysian HEI's have been slowly picking up the practice (Bakar, Sharif and Abdullah 2019: 199; Rahman *et al.* 2019: 1). However, an exception in this context has been Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), which has embodied CE in its five decades of academic standing (Hwai *et al.* 2021: 243).

### 1.4.5 Community engagement in higher education: An Indian perspective

Developments in the Indian context, in light of the contemporary social realities, has indicated a transition towards a knowledge driven society (Prasad 2014: 210). At the core of this transition, rests the social development role of HEI's, channelled through the establishment of new relationships between production, dissemination and application of knowledge, through public engagement (Prasad 2014: 210; Panwar 2020: 38). However, the appearance of CE in its contemporary form in Indian higher education has been a slow progression (Singh and Tandon 2015: 115). The earliest manifestations of CE appeared within efforts to connect Indian academia with the community, through the introduction of the National Service Scheme (NSS), as a government mandate for achieving the dual objective of educational reform and increasing the quality of Indian higher education (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports 2006: 5). However, activities under NSS mostly remained assorted, and in the form of 'adding-on' CE, rather than making it a part of higher education itself (Tandon 2014: 7). Some other manifestations of CE included the component of field action projects in Indian social work education (Prasad 2014: 211), and 'extension activities', which mainly appeared in Agricultural studies, which was seen as the application of classroom knowledge from the university within the community, for the latter's benefit (Narang 1996, cited in Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 198).

Further, the establishment of institutions like the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 and the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in 2005, further outlined the need for social engagement in higher education, in an effort to bring about transformational social changes and for responding to the needs of the 21st century (Pillai, Manjunath and Hasan 2006: 1; National Knowledge Commission 2009: 80). However, the most concrete development in this context came in the form of the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017), which called for strengthening CE in Indian HEI's and promoting social responsibility of higher education (Planning Commission 2013: 111). Under the aegis of the plan, other plans and programs aimed at strengthening CE were also launched by Indian higher education policy regulators like the UGC and the Ministry of Education, but none of them could drive or sustain the momentum (as discussed in section 1.3). Among the reasons which contributed to the same included absence of clear directives on CE implementation, funding

challenges, conceptualization issues, overt emphasis on teaching and research with engagement pushed to a peripheral position, assortment of CE into the social sciences disciplines, amongst others (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 13; Panwar 2020: 38; Kavatekar 2022: 1211; Panwar 2023: 222). This was also evident in the scant literature on CE in the Indian context in the past decade, owing to its weak practice and the paucity of any research based or empirical studies in this context.

The Indian higher education sector, facing such challenges with respect to implementation of CE in the past decade, received a major boost, with the introduction of the NEP 2020 (devised by the Ministry of Education), which provided a fresh momentum to the CE agenda in the country (MHRD 2020: 34). Additionally, the launch of the UGC Guidelines on fostering social responsibility and community engagement (under the aegis of the revised UBA 2.0) (UGC 2020: 7) in HEI's in India has rekindled the interest of Indian academia in this field, which is evident in the emergence of new practices and empirical evidence of the same (Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 158). Both policy documents envision higher education in India to play an extremely important role in human and societal well-being, along with being a key to a progressive and prosperous nation, while also recognizing importance and value of CE in the process (MHRD 2020: 34; UGC 2020: 5). Kavatekar (2022: 1821) viewed the policy driver of NEP as playing a critical role in shaping and building up the practice of CE in Indian HEI's, harnessing it's the talent and resources for holistic community development. Similarly, Joseph and Jacob (2021: 115) ascribed much importance to the UGC guidelines 2020, as playing an important role in promoting CE in Indian HEI's by emphasizing real world and immersive learning opportunities. These developments coincided with the strong advocacy of CE and community-university partnerships in research, spearheaded by the Indian leg of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education (Hall and Tandon 2021: 5; Lepore, Hall and Tandon 2023: 6).

Among the impacts emerging from such contemporary developments was the increase in the literary outputs in the field of CE in the Indian context in the past few years. Most of such scholarly work has focused on documenting institutional CE practices and outlining the impact arising from the same (Sahoo and Dash 2020: 37; Anand 2021: 205; Shankar 2021: 86; Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 164; Jose and Sahu 2023: 226;

Panwar 2023: 215). Further, these developments also resulted in the resurgence of CE in the Indian higher educational context, with an increasing number of HEI's expressing their interest, willingness and commitment to engage in CE. However, this resurgence has seldom been complemented with proportionate increase in opportunities for building the understanding and competencies in CE, with many universities actively seeking guidance and assistance in this regard (Agarwal 2022: para. 10 line I). Therefore, for ensuring that the emerging momentum is not lost again, as happened earlier; it is extremely important to fill the gaps and address the challenges which weakened the CE movement in India, in the past decade. This will entail paying special attention to details, such as provision of clarity on the conceptualization of CE, and facilitated assistance on its practical modus-operandi, as mandated by the recent policy guidelines. Further, it is also important to focus on aspects related to the institutionalization of CE, as envisaged in the policy objectives, which call for embedding CE into the central academic framework as a core and integral practice, on par with the teaching and research function. In lieu of this, the present study becomes more valuable in the given context, as it specifically addresses these pertinent issues, which may well shape the future discourse of CE in Indian higher education.

## 1.5 Aim of the study

This study aimed to explore and understand the current practice of CE in Indian HEI's, and to present a framework for strengthening this area of work.

## 1.6 Objectives of the study

In order to fulfil the aim of the study, five key objectives were used as follows:

1. To understand how CE is conceptualized at HEI's in India.
2. To enquire about how CE may be institutionalized at HEI's in India.
3. To explore how CE is being operationalized within the context of its integration in teaching, research and service.
4. To document the varied and best practice models/adaptations of CE in Indian HEI's; and,

5. To develop a framework which outlines strategies that may guide and strengthen the practice of CE in India.

## 1.7 Research questions that guided the study

The main research question of the study is as follows: What is the current practice of CE at Indian HEI's and what framework can be used to guide CE at HEI's in India?

The key research sub-questions that guided the study were:

1. How is CE conceptualized at HEI's in India?
2. How can CE be institutionalized at HEI's in India?
3. How is CE is being operationalized within the context of its integration in teaching, research and service?
4. What are the best practice models/adaptations of CE in Indian HEI's?
5. What are the strategies that can be included in a framework that may guide and strengthen the practice of CE in India?

## 1.8 Significance of the study

The value of this study emerges from the dearth of empirical studies focusing on CE at Indian HEI's; and consequently, the need for scholarly work that understands, systematizes, and embeds its practice in Indian higher education (as discussed in section 1.3). As a result of the lack of empirical research in this area, Indian HEI's have failed to recognize that traditional extension and outreach programs, although important, are insufficient to bring about meaningful engagement between HEI's and the communities (Agarwal 2022: para. 10 line 12). Furthermore, very few research based studies in the Indian context have shed light on the operationalization of CE in the Indian context, rural or otherwise, which contributes to the discrepancies in the understanding of CE (Agarwal 2022: para. 10 line 15). These pointers make this study very valuable and pertinent within the Indian context, as it not only addresses the knowledge gap in this area, but also contributes towards developing a holistic understanding of the conceptualization and practice of CE at Indian HEI's.

Further, the lack of research evidence has also led to the haphazard, casual and lackadaisical implementation of CE (Panwar 2020: 46), which has been viewed as

peripheral to the core academic functions (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 14). Accordingly, Mittal (2021: 199) called for the development of an institutional mechanism, which can enable a holistic and functional approach to CE, while making it a part of teaching, learning, producing and sharing knowledge. However, Shankar (2021: 80) asserted that the CE function, which involves creative societal application of the knowledge generated, has been relegated as an expendable activity in Indian HEI's. He further added that in the absence of any analysis on CE strategies and modalities; the work has failed to attract attention, importance, and hence remains fragmented (Shankar 2021: 80). This research study fills this gap as it seeks not only to explore the strategies to institutionalize CE at Indian HEI's, but also its operationalization at the interface of the core academic functions of teaching, research and service.

The importance of this study becomes even more pronounced, given the recent policy endorsement for this work in the Indian context. This is because, despite the policy backing; there have been limited opportunities to build the correct understanding and competencies in CE, to affect its meaningful implementation (Agarwal 2022: para. 11 line 16). This runs the risk of good ideas being implemented carelessly, not in its true spirit, and may possibly also be undertaken as mere lip service by HEI's, that are seeking to comply with the policy mandates (Agarwal 2022: para. 11 line 10). It is within this context, that it can be reasonably concluded that with the top-down policy push, an increasing number of HEI's will be entering the realm of CE in the future. Consequently, it becomes even more important to support the policy guidelines with thorough, evidence based scholarly work, which will not only demystify the practice of CE, but also shed light on its practical implementation. In terms of the latter, the framework for guiding and supporting CE in Indian HEI's, as emerging from this study, is expected to significantly advance its practice in India, while shaping its development in the future. Further, the fact that no prior doctoral study or other research studies, on these aspects has ever been conducted in the Indian context, further enhances the value of this work.

Finally, this study along with emerging as a rich source of knowledge on CE in higher education in the Indian context; will also contribute to the international body of knowledge in this field. This contribution is poised not only to be rich in terms of its

scholarly content; but also unique, owing to the exclusive Indian context and the diverse nature and practices embedded in Indian HEI's. Therefore, in addition to adding value to the practice of CE in the Indian context, the study will also make a significant contribution from an international perspective, by providing unique, evidence-based, and rich learning for the global scholarly community.

## 1.9 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework provides a conceptual lens through which a study can be viewed (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011: 10). A more formal definition of a theoretical framework was provided by Flick (2018b: 606), who described it as a set of backgrounds or theoretical assumptions guiding a specific approach in qualitative research. Another definition proposed by Anfara (2008: 869) situated theoretical framework as any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes at a variety of levels that can be applied to the understanding of a phenomenon. Accordingly, it has the ability to (a) focus a study (b) situate the research in a scholarly conversation and provide a vernacular (c) reveal and conceal meaning and understanding, and (d) reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the study (Anfara 2008: 872). The wide variety of theoretical frameworks available for qualitative researchers to consider, originate in the many different fields of study and disciplines in social and natural sciences (Anfara 2008: 871).

In light of the above, and in the context of this research study, Boyer's framework for CE in HEI's was adopted, which suggested four interrelated areas for scholars to work on, for developing knowledge that addressed communal needs (Boyer 1996: 26). Boyer's framework or model of CE emerged in the early 1990s as a critique of the conventional, monolithic, constricting and rigid academic silos within which the higher education functions of teaching, research and service, operated (Boyer 1990: 62; Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 127). Accordingly, Boyer proposed that HEI's should demonstrate their commitment to searching for solutions to pertinent social issues (in the field of health, civic, economic and moral problems) through the use of four domains of engagement (Boyer 1996: 26-27). Symbolized as forms of knowledge exchange between HEI's and communities, the four domains proposed were: scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of sharing knowledge, and scholarship of application (Boyer 1996: 26-27). This framework,

conceptualized through these four domains was adopted as a guide for understanding how academics conceptualized, institutionalized and operationalized CE at the interface of the teaching, research and service functions at their respective HEI's. These four domains are discussed further below:

Scholarship of discovery

In describing the scholarship of discovery, Boyer (1996: 26) insisted that, 'universities through research, simply must continue to push back the frontier of human knowledge'. In doing so, he argued for the production of new knowledge for either the community or the academe, as the basis of healthy engagement activity between the HEI's and the communities, and therefore, also pushed the agenda of collaborative research, as one of the central outcomes of CE (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 127). Further, Renwick et al. (2020: 1239) highlighted that the scholarship of discovery contributed to the wealth of human knowledge and also the intellectual capacity of a HEI. In this context and in relation to the Indian HEI's engaged in CE, who have been engaging in different collaborative knowledge production activities, along with the communities, through different modalities of teaching-learning, research and service; this domain of scholarship of discovery holds particular importance. Accordingly, using this lens to understand the academic's experiences in CE and collaborative knowledge production was much useful for addressing the study's research objectives.

Scholarship of integration

Closely linked to the scholarship of discovery, the second domain of Boyer's framework, called as scholarship of integration, intends to fill the gaps in the former, and place discoveries in a larger context, through interdisciplinary conversations (Boyer 1996: 26; Renwick et al. 2020: 1233). Through the scholarship of integration, Boyer (1990: 18) underscored the need for scholars to 'give meaning to isolated facts, and putting them in perspective, thereby making connections across disciplines, placing the specialties in a larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating non-specialists too. With increasing emphasis on cross-disciplinary convergence in contemporary higher education, this form of scholarship focusing on integration assumes increased importance (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma

2016: 127). With increased instances of inter-disciplinary initiatives at HEI's, aimed at community development, the scholarship of integration provides a useful framework to study, assess and analyse not only the conceptualization of CE, but also its operationalization and diverse modalities. Further, the relevance and usefulness of this domain to this research study, also reflects in the diverse experiences of academics in CE, which often transcended disciplinary divisions, and therefore, emerges as a useful frame for study and analysis of the topic at hand.

Scholarship of application

The third domain in the Boyer's framework focuses on how new knowledge constructed can be understood in theory and practice, so as to increase its authenticity and usefulness in developing a greater understanding of complex social problems (Renwick et al. 2020: 1233). Therefore, it focuses on the responsible application of knowledge, in a way that it can help individuals, institutions and be applied to solve consequential problems (Boyer 1990: 21). With increased emphasis being placed on making knowledge useful for the society, particularly in light of the contemporary social challenges, this domain of Boyer's framework has risen in prominence (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 128). Viewed in terms of CE, this application component of Boyer's framework is particularly relevant, as it moves beyond production of new knowledge, towards focusing on making it relevant in the day to day lives of the communities ((Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 128). In light of these arguments, and considering that the study aims to explore the different facets of CE, as practiced by academics in Indian HEI's; this domain provides a useful reflective frame, to study the knowledge production through CE, and also its usefulness for communities, amidst the pressing social challenges.

Scholarship of teaching

Boyer (1990: 23) describes the fourth domain under the framework, as scholarship of teaching focuses on how academia and its work is understood by others, and the corresponding impact it has on them. He emphasizes this aspect as he states that, 'the work of the professor becomes consequential, only as it is understood by others' (Boyer 1990: 23). Therefore, Star-Glass (2011, cited in Renwick et al. 2020: 1233) interprets this form of scholarship as 'academics working in a communal way by

communicating through teaching, and making explicit the linkages between knowledge, in ways that enable both 'transformed and extended knowledge'. Viewed from the lens of CE, this form of scholarship facilitates the mutual engagement of staff, students and community members in teaching and learning processes (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 128). Furthermore, the scholarship of teaching, in terms of CE, is not limited to moving from theory to practice, but also involves inculcation of critical thinking and life-long learning skills (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 128). In the context of this research study, and with its particular focus on academics, their teaching pedagogies and application of CE, the frame of scholarship of teaching provides a unique opportunity to gauge the teaching-learning practices, its pedagogies, the community engaged methodologies adopted and the emergent impact in much detail.

## 1.10 Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises of five chapters, which are detailed as follows:

**Chapter One**: The first chapter introduced the notion of CE at Indian HEI's. In doing so, it provided the overall context for the study, situating it within the broader global arena. Further, the chapter provided an outline of the problem statement and the rationale for the study, together with a crisp presentation of the basic framework of CE and an overview of CE from a global and an Indian perspective. Finally, the aim, objectives, research questions guiding the study, and its significance was outlined.

**Chapter Two**: The second chapter presents a holistic review of literature on the study. This was covered by exploring the broad contextual background, while it focused particularly on the emergence and practice of CE at the global level; followed by capturing the scholarly literature on CE in the Indian framework. A detailed literature review on the key concepts related to the study was also included.

**Chapter Three**: The third chapter introduces the research methodology adopted to guide the study. Accordingly, it presented a detailed overview of the study design, population and sampling strategies used. Further, it also elucidated the process of data collection and data analysis. A section dedicated to providing the strategies for

ensuring the trustworthiness of the research study and compliance with ethical considerations was also included.

**Chapter Four**: The fourth chapter provides a detailed presentation of the data emerging from the study, along with a holistic discussion on the findings, grounded in scholarly literature. This chapter also provided a methodical presentation of findings, closely aligned with the research objectives of the study, for a coherent understanding of same.

**Chapter Five**: The fifth chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations, that emerged from the study. Most importantly, it presents a framework to guide the field of CE in Indian higher education. This was developed from insights that emerged from the study, in line with the last objective of the study. Finally, a section on the limitations of the study and recommendations for future section was outlined.

## 1.11 Conclusion

This chapter introduced this study on the status of CE at Indian HEI's. In the process, it provided a holistic overview and understanding of the background to the study; the problem statement and the rationale of the study. Additionally, it highlighted some of the key concepts and perspectives in relation to the study, along with outlining its aim, research objectives and questions that guided the study. The chapter also envisioned the significance of the study and how it would contribute to global and Indian scholarly work on CE, along with positioning the theoretical framework that guided the study.

The next chapter (Chapter 2) puts together an exhaustive review of literature in relation to the study topic.

# CHAPTER TWO:
# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

A literature review is a systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners (Fink 2019: 6). It can be defined as the analysis of scientific materials on a specific topic that requires the reviewer to read each of the studies carefully to evaluate the study purpose, determine the appropriateness and quality of the scientific methods, examine the analysis of the questions and answers posed by the authors, compare the findings across the studies, and write an objective synthesis of the findings (Garrard 2020: 4), Therefore, the basic purpose of a literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to a particular topic or area of study, and to present that knowledge in the form of a written report (Western Sydney University 2017: 1). Consistent with these ideas, chapter two of the study, reviews and presents the seminal, salient, pertinent and contemporary literature in the field of community engagement (CE) in higher education.

Accordingly, it is structured in the following manner: while the chapter begins by providing a broad overview of the global scenario and the positioning of higher education (section 2.2), it goes on to trace the emergence of the global CE agenda (section 2.3). The next section(s) numbered 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 present some of the key scholarly literature, on the aspects of conceptualization, institutionalization, and operationalization of CE from a global perspective, respectively (in line with the first three research objectives of the study). The next section(s) 2.7 and 2.8 present the Indian context, with respect to its contemporary social scenario and the role of higher education, and the development of the field of CE in India, respectively. Finally, the chapter closes with a short conclusion section (section 2.9).

## 2.2 Contemporary challenges and the role of higher education in society: Global scenario

This section provides the broad context for the study, as it introduces the global challenges of the 21st century, and the positioning, role, and functions of higher education in light of the same. In doing so, this section contextualizes the research study in a way that it better connects to the broader social realities of the present times.

### 2.2.1 Global challenges and the dilemmas of the 21st century

Contemporary global and local 'grand' challenges of the 21st century (relating to climate change, migration, income inequality, health, safety, food security, water, gender violence, unemployment, migration, etc.) are complex, fast evolving and create ripple effects in different settings (Holland and Malone 2019: 2; Farnell 2020: 6). This scenario was exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an era of uncertainty and opportunity at the same time, and which called for a transition or a civilisational shift to a newly imagined world (Hall and Tandon 2021: 1; UNDP 2022: 3). Escrigas *et al.* (2014: xxxii) referred to these challenges as a civilizational crisis, which has gradually enhanced in magnitude and is being increasingly manifested across multiple levels of human development. The co-existence of paradoxical situations like material prosperity and deprivation; democracy and exclusion; economic growth and environmental degradation, further complicates this scenario, making it even more challenging, while also posing crucial questions around sustainability (Singh 2017: 2).

Further, Greenwood and Levin (2016: 7) noted the challenges posed by a neoliberal cultural regime, which has resulted in the creation of a more unequal and anti-democratic world, that history has ever witnessed. This was corroborated by the World Social Report 2023, which cautioned that the levels, at which inequality is rising in the world, it threatens to become a defining feature of present and future human generations (UN 2023: iv). This validated the findings of the 2016 World Social Science Report, which highlighted the challenging issue of global inequality, including inequalities in the construction of knowledge (relating to what kind of knowledge is produced, by whom, where and for what purpose) and its linkages to critical issues

like planetary survival, health, gender justice, cultural justice etc. (ISSC, IDS and UNESCO 2016: 274; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 19).

While these global trends and challenges impact different regions, communities, and nations differently (based on their socio-economic positioning); Tandon *et al.* (2016: 21) highlighted the need to approach these challenges from a global lens, while incorporating local perspectives. Building on this argument, Hall and Tandon (2021: 1) suggested that while our limited capacities to understand the way forward may have been reached; we must have an unlimited capacity to care for each other and the planet, which we are a part of. This calls for consensual development of new models of human development and well-being (Tandon *et al.* 2016: 21).

### 2.2.2 Higher education vis-à-vis the global grand challenges

A significant component of the new models of human development efforts needs to be led by Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) (also referred to as 'universities' in the context of the study), considering their critical role as agents of social change (Ruiz 2014: 44). HEI's can help societies to address local and global challenges and generate new solutions to the most pressing economic, social and ecological problems (Grau *et al.* 2017a: 38). The visions and actions of HEI's can reinforce their roles towards the creation and distribution of socially relevant knowledge in education and research, in relationships with communities (Hall *et al.* 2014: 301). Building on these arguments on the positioning of HEI's in the contemporary context; Goddard (2017: 116) referred to them as 'urban anchor institutions' (characterized as being not just 'in' the place, but 'of' the place), whilst Singh (2020: 14) viewed them as 'critical societal institutions', entrusted with the role of producing knowledge for transformative social change.

Further, the urgency and complexity of contemporary social challenges requires HEI's to reconsider their role in the society, and channel efforts towards the development of effective solutions (Holland and Malone 2019: 2). This needs to be done through a planned agenda of directing campus expertise and areas of inquiry towards enabling constructive and productive interactions with citizens, government, business and non-government organisations (NGO's) for developing effective action-based solutions (Holland and Malone 2019: 2). As there can be no underestimation of the difficulty of

the present challenges, universities around the world need to learn to collaborate across disciplines and with other societal sectors to develop new approaches to address '*glocal*' challenges (Holland and Malone 2019: 2). This is also important because societal needs (given the challenges) are complex and require new knowledge that involves partnerships within and outside the academy (Farner 2019: 147).

Therefore, there is a need to collectively find new and innovative ways for people to work together, to act in response to the deep issues that confront society (Tandon *et al.* 2016: 21). This aspect accords critical importance to the co-creation of knowledge by diverse societal stakeholders, of whom HEI's are a vital part (Tandon *et al.* 2016: 21). These arguments were earlier corroborated by Escrigas *et al.* (2014: xxxiv), who called for a need to link multiple areas of knowledge that are complementary in capacity, to deal with complex problems and to find solutions in the local and global context. Lee (2020: 1565) supported this perspective as she shared that good intentions on the part of HEI's will no longer serve this purpose, and therefore, called for innovative, intensive, reciprocal and deliberative cross-sectoral collaborations. This is now being reflected in global higher education agendas (such as that endorsed by the American Association of Colleges & Universities; the renewed European Union agenda for higher education; South African Higher Education Quality Committee, etc.), which highlight the need for HEI's to target holistic societal transformation (Batten *et al.* 2017: 4; Bhagwan 2017b: 172; Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 9).

Therefore, universities have a critical role to play in our rapidly changing, fractured and fragile world (Jones *et al.* 2021: 331). Further, Bhagwan (2019: 1) opined that universities are ideally positioned to enable socio-economic development because they are home to a range of disciplines that have deeper understanding of problems and their potential solutions. Petter (2017: 431) proposed a unique view in this context (with respect to the impact on universities), as he argued that universities fare best when they understand current issues and dedicate their resources towards addressing societal needs.

### 2.2.3 Purpose, role and positioning of higher education and its social responsibilities

The aforementioned context has led to the resurfacing of foundational questions on the purpose of higher education and its institutions in academic literature, which is replete with conversations on the core purpose of education (Goddard *et al.* 2016: 4; Benneworth 2017: 251; Farnell 2020: 11; Kallenberg *et al.* 2020: 1; Hall and Tandon 2021: 1). Two key debates which emerged in this context, is the global versus local role of higher education (Goddard *et al.* 2016: 10; Farnell 2020: 21); co-existing with a parallel debate which argues on the public versus private character of HEI's (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 2; Khanyile 2020: 110; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 3).

However, all such debates begin with an exploration of the basic purpose and philosophy of education. While HEI's are generally understood as pursuing exclusive educational, intellectual and social functions, through their core missions of teaching, research and service (Rahman *et al.* 2019: 1); debates on their core purpose persist till today (Farnell 2020: 11). A deeper exploration of this context begins with understanding the very meaning of the word 'universities', and its evolutionary context. The origin of the term university can be traced back to the Latin word, '*universitas*' (meaning 'community'), which can be further traced back to the classical Latin word, *'universus'* (meaning totality) (Khanyile 2020: 113). Universities, typically include any kind of HEI's which have significant knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination function (Boyer 1990: 16). Supporting this view, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 29) referred to universities as organizational spaces, which have knowledge workers that engage with communities in various ways.

These arguments connecting universities, their core function of knowledge creation, and communities have crucial implications, with regards to shaping their role in the current scenario. Accordingly, in the contemporary context, the role of higher education in the broader society has been viewed from the dual lens of the global and the local (Ibrahim 2017: 78). Within this framework, Grau *et al.* (2017a: 38) argued that HEI's emerge as key players from both perspectives, in their capacity to contribute to the global challenges (summarized by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)) and in contributing to the to the social, cultural and economic

development of their immediate, local societies. Further, Thomson *et al.* (2011: 216) posited that as societies seek to align the local context to national priorities and global pressures; higher education itself undergoes rapid and dynamic changes. Corroborating this view, Grau *et al.* (2017a: 42) opined that considering the contemporary challenges (in the economic, political and social domain), the role of HEI's has been seen to change over time; from preservers of culturally revered forms of knowledge, to producers of skilled labour associated with a workforce-planning approach, and to a more recent perception as agents of social change and development.

Consistent with this view, a growing body of literature supports the view that HEI's are public institutions, contributing to public good (Goddard *et al.* 2016: 4; Hazelkorn 2016, cited in Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 55; Chankseliani, Qoraboyev and Gimranova 2021: 118; Sasaki and Horng 2023: 2). Proponents of this view believe that it is the public purpose of higher education, which prepares humanity for sustainable futures and one which is also well aligned with the four pillars of education for 21st century, proposed by UNESCO (learning to know, learning to do, learning to live and learning to be (Hall and Tandon 2020b: 23; Rodrigues 2021: 53). A recent addition to this list has been learning to transform oneself and society (UNESCO 2017: 7). On the other hand, another co-existing body of literature explores the reductionist, private-purpose serving nature of HEI's, who operate as entrepreneurial and business-based models, under the broader framework of new public management/managerialism (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019; Khanyile 2020). This functional aspect of HEI's has been characterized as being authoritarian, market-oriented and focused on the issues of value for money, impact and economic benefit, rather than the welfare of the communities in which they are located (Goddard *et al.* 2016: 4).

This context set the stage for renewed debates on the social value and public purpose of higher education. While early debates mostly focused on the quality, financing and student mobility in higher education; questions pertaining to their social responsibilities have been of recent occurrence (Hall *et al.* 2019: 467). These questions have received support from the proponents of public purpose of higher education (Benneworth 2017: 252; Shawa 2020: 115; Jones *et al.* 2021: 331; Lee, Tai and Nguyen 2023: 105). Here, Farnell (2020: 11) added that the higher education mission in the 21st century should

include responding to societal needs, and this mission should be carried out by systematic engagement with external communities. The aspect of social relevance/responsibility of higher education received a fresh impetus, when it was mentioned in the communique of the 2009 World Conference of Higher Education, which highlighted that higher education has the social responsibility to advance the human understanding of multifaceted issues, and generate new knowledge for addressing global challenges (UNESCO 2009: 2). Since then, several authors have emphasized the importance of this area of work from time to time (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 10; Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 196; Tandon 2014: 5; Grau *et al.* 2017a: 498; Kallenberg *et al.* 2020: 7; Mbhalati *et al.* 2022: 122). Placing his arguments in this perspective, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 19) asserted that universities are 'fundamentally societal institutions', who have been inextricably intertwined to societies and are responsible for their welfare. This idea has essentially ensured their sustained relevance till today (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 19).

However, given the recent developments, and amidst the rising pressures from the neoliberal discourse and the knowledge economy movement, it was observed that higher education has been producing students who have been 'disengaged' from their immediate societies (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 3). As a result, there has been increasing calls for HEI's, to reclaim their social mission and nurture socially responsible students, who can emerge as active and engaged citizens (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 3). Along similar lines, at the conference of university leaders 2016, Professor Craig Mahoney, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of West Scotland, United Kingdom remarked that, "if we are not socially responsible, there is no future of our universities" (Srivastava 2017: 312). Further, societally relevant higher education is applicable to everything that a university does: teaching, research and service, which cuts across disciplines and faculties, and is not just an extra-mural, ornamental extension activity in a siloed department (Tandon 2017: 7). Building on this argument further, Srivastava (2017: 329) attributed 'social responsibility' to be the prime responsibility of a university, which should be manifested not only in their core activities, but also in their governance structure and institutional environment. However, this requires taking a closer look at the scenario in which HEI's operate, which includes considering the implications of the various challenges that confront it.

### 2.2.4 Challenges faced by contemporary higher education

Co-existing with the scholarly work on the role, relevance, purpose and positioning of higher education, is another section of literature which focuses on the challenges faced by HEI's; which are much pertinent to the discussions at hand. A critical analysis of this body of work, births three major categorizations, each of which accounts for specific challenge faced by higher education, in the contemporary context.

The *first* and the most important category relates to the challenges faced by HEI's in the form of the neoliberal orientation of the public policy discourse (Razak and Afendras 2014: 105; Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 2; Khanyile 2020: 111; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 3). Related perspectives include increased challenges and pressures on higher education such as the decreasing role of the state and increasing role of the market, and the emergence of rankings and their effect on public policies, which in turn has explained the relative non-involvement of HEI's in global issues (Grau *et al.* 2017a: 51). The ensuing challenges of this discourse has further contributed to the commodification and marketisation of knowledge production (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 2). Therefore, under its influence, HEI's operate as business minded enterprises or corporations, and are being increasingly perceived as encouraging entrepreneurial motives in the form of commercialization of research and innovation, which places private agendas over the public good mission (Khanyile 2020: 110). This has resulted in the loss of public confidence in research and science (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 3). This reality has therefore, necessitated the reframing of the public value of science and knowledge production regimes (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 3).

Ironically, this scenario co-exists with another contemporary reality wherein the higher education sector (in their capacity as public institutions, serving public good) has been increasingly challenged by the society to reclaim their public purpose and play a central role in addressing the grand challenges of the 21$^{st}$ century, by reframing the public value of knowledge production, and attending to its social responsibilities (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008: 306; Goddard *et al.* 2016: 8; Grau *et al.* 2017a; Laszlo *et al.* 2020: 153; Ali *et al.* 2021: 3). This constitutes the *second* challenge faced by HEI's, which also has important implications for sustaining their relevance in the contemporary context (Singer 2020: 197). Given this reality, Thomson *et al.* (2011:

216), opined that it is important for HEI's to understand its history, articulate, and accept its role with reference to diverse societal constituencies and stakeholders, in order to create an appropriate future within its own societal context. Benneworth (2017: 253) further argued that HEI's need to become better at hearing the voices of those impacted by the local manifestations of global problems, by effectively organizing their main mission activities of teaching and learning, research and innovation and outreach and service.

This has led to the *third* set of challenges for HEI's, which involves providing clarity on how discovery and learning are valued, within the broader context of institutional structures and functions (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 17). In this vein, Tandon and Hall (2021: 301), while acknowledging the debilitating pressures posed on higher education by the 'knowledge economy movement', called for a revamped knowledge system, where respect and transparent sharing of knowledge happens in intersectional contexts. This involves interactions between non-academic and academic, indigenous and non-indigenous stakeholders, where knowledge plays a transformative and active role for the benefit of the public good (Tandon and Hall 2021: 301). The challenge herein is to expand the scope of traditional notions of academic functions, to one which is more socially engaged and contextually relevant (Holland and Malone 2019: 6). This has led to the emergence of a revamped third mission of higher education in general, and the CE movement in particular (Holland and Malone 2019: 6).

## 2.3 Emergence of the community engagement agenda in higher education

This section traces the origins and development of the CE agenda at the global level, along with other related dimensions of the same. In doing so, it captures some of the seminal literature on the topic and allied concepts.

### 2.3.1 Renewed focus on the third mission of higher education

While the third mission of higher education includes its holistic contribution to the society in its broadest sense, and has co-existed with the idea of universities, following the 1980s, the activities under this mission have primarily focused on economic

development at the expense of social development (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 30). The reasons for this can be traced back to the years, following the second world war, when HEI's were expected to justify the financial investment made in them by taxpayers, by demonstrating the economic impacts of their knowledge production function (Farnell 2020: 13). This argument was earlier propounded by Fitzgerald *et al.* (2012: 10), who explained the change in relationships between the HEI's and federal governments, given the need for new technologies that supported an emergent world power. This was based on an underlying perception that viewed faculty as 'disciplinary experts', disconnected from the community context and community input (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 10). This resulted in a narrowly focused and commercialized view of knowledge, which came into prominent focus, since the 1980s, when economic objectives dominated the knowledge production activities (Farnell 2020: 13). This led to the emergence of a cohort of students who were disconnected and disengaged from their social realities (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 3). Therefore, at that time, the social development role of universities, in supporting societal needs, addressing its challenges and advancing social development, while informing public policy was not very prominent (Farnell 2020: 13).

However, the 1990s witnessed a renewed focus on the third mission of HEI's, led by the demand placed on them to become more community-engaged, socially relevant and contribute to positive social outcomes (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 11). This focus was driven by the realization that the kinds of specialized and disciplinary knowledge that dominated the latter part of the 20$^{th}$ century, was inadequate to fully address the 'grand challenges' in the contemporary context (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 11). A parallel development at this time was the emergence and application of Mode 2 knowledge production, which referred to interdisciplinary and practical application of science for solving 'real world problems' (using knowledge for the benefit of the society) as opposed to Mode 1, which emphasized fundamental/traditional, disciplinary research (and focused on using knowledge for knowledge's sake) (Gibbons *et al.* 1994: 3). This further contributed towards shaping the social development agenda of HEI's in the recent years (UNESCO and UNESCO IESALC 2021: 18).

### 2.3.2 Rise of the community engagement agenda

From a historical perspective, the origin of CE can be traced back to the establishment of 'land-grant universities' in the United States of America (USA) in 1862, which witnessed the coming together of various societal stakeholders (such as college faculty, students, farmers and business owners) (Farnell 2020: 14). This was aimed at generating the infrastructure necessary for transforming an emergent nation into an industrial and technology-based economy (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 9; Farnell 2020: 14). Often referenced as the first example of CE in higher education, such universities were characterized by their response to the local needs of agricultural communities (Farnell 2020: 14). However, they drew support from three federal Acts (Morrill Actin 1862, Hatch Act in 1887, and the Smith-Lever Act in 1914), which created a public system of connecting universities and citizens for creating a stronger democratic society (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 9).

In a more contemporary context, the renewed attention on CE was driven by the developments as discussed in the preceding sections, especially the renewed attention to the third mission of higher education. This was mainly based on the realization that higher education had drifted too far away from its 'public purpose' (given the challenges plaguing society), which led to critics calling for a renewed emphasis, on the social relevance of higher education and an enhanced quality of student experience. This primarily included a broader and holistic definition of scholarship-based teaching, research and service, and a categorical focus on the resolution of a wide range of societal problems, which ultimately led to the rise of a 'new kind of engagement', popularly known as CE in higher education (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 10; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 248). This new model of 'engagement' built on the understanding that not all knowledge and expertise reside in the academy, and that both expertise and great learning opportunities in teaching and scholarship are also available in non-academic settings (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 10). The application of this understanding is well reflected in the contemporary context, for instance, in the Malaysian national educational philosophy, which is based on the principle that the process of individual development is not limited to the time they spend at education institutions; but includes the time they spend with others as well (Rahman *et al.* 2019: 9).

Further, undergirding this new engagement philosophy also includes the understanding that societal issues are complex and inherently multidisciplinary, whose resolution requires generation of new knowledge that involves partnerships within and outside the academy (Grau *et al.* 2017a: 44; Farner 2019: 147; Holland and Malone 2019: 2). Running parallel to this renewed focus on engagement has been the emergence of Mode 3 of knowledge production; a system that values research impact on society, with an emphasis on partnerships between universities, industry, government and the civil society (Boehm 2015: 2). As a result, attention has now shifted towards how knowledge is reoriented in a way that makes it relevant for addressing the social, economic and urban development needs of the society (Nkhoma 2018: 281).

### 2.3.3 Introductory ideas and propositions on community engagement

The origin of the term 'engagement' can be traced back to the concept of 'utility', proposed by Versey (1965, cited in Welch 2016: 35), who described it as working towards a collective goal of practical application of the knowledge generated in the academy, into the world outside. This view of 'utility' finds consistency with the civic mission of higher education, as it involves dissemination of knowledge in society, in line with democratic ideals and to promote public welfare (Versey 1965, cited in Welch 2016: 35). However, the term 'CE' as understood in the present context, draws from the seminal ideas of the scholarship(s) of discovery, application, learning and teaching, proposed by Dr Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who is credited to formally position the concept in academic literature (Boyer 1990: 16). Dr Boyer, later referred to this as the 'scholarship of engagement', a concept that was built on the premise that HEI's need to become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to the most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems (Boyer 1996: 18; Welch 2016: 44). According to Dr Boyer, the four basic interlocking functions of this new paradigm of scholarship, were the scholarship of discovery (pushing back the frontiers of human knowledge), the scholarship of integration (enhanced focus on interdisciplinarity), the scholarship of teaching/sharing knowledge (communicating academic knowledge to the public), and the scholarship of application of knowledge (making knowledge useful, by applying the same for common good) (Boyer 1996: 26).

Building on this pioneering piece of literature, many scholars and prominent academics have since then written on the topic of CE, in an attempt to provide clarity on what the concept entails, within the context of HEI's. For instance, Lazarus *et al.* (2008: 61) proposed that CE is the combination and integration of service with teaching and research, related and applied to identified community development priorities. Hall (2009: 13), posited CE as a critical strategic choice for public investment, which can help frame responses to the global challenges faced by humanity. He, therefore, stressed the importance and value of CE in serving the public good by transforming the health and well-being of communities (Hall 2009: 13). Further, the foundational difference between the notions of 'service and outreach' and 'CE' was articulated by the Kellogg Commission (1999, cited in Weerts and Sandmann 2008: 634), which stated that while the former involves one-way approaches to delivering knowledge and service to the public, CE emphasizes a two-way approach in which HEI's, and community partners collaborate to develop and apply knowledge to address societal needs.

Accordingly, Furco (2010: 381) positioned CE as an integral part of HEI missions, as he argued that CE serves all parts of the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, and can hence be used to advance the latter, which he referred to as being the basic premise of an 'engaged university'. He further added that within such institutions, community-based activities (under the broader framework of CE), are not viewed as separate programmes, but rather as strategies for advancing and achieving the institution's research, teaching and/or public service goals; operationalized as community-engaged teaching, community-engaged research and community-engaged service (Furco 2010: 383). A parallel conception in this regard is the concept of a 'civic university', which integrates teaching, research and engagement with the outside world, so that each enhances the other, without diminishing their quality (Goddard 2017: 124). As a result, realizing the full potential of a civic university will not only depend on what the university does, but also on the capacity of its civic partners in the public and private sector (Goddard 2017: 124).

Therefore, the basic idea herein is 'not to do' CE, but rather use it as one valued vehicle to advance institutional missions and priorities (Furco 2014: 266). Building on the concept of 'engaged university', Fitzgerald *et al.* (2012: 15) referred to it as one

that produces knowledge that benefits the society and educates students for productive roles in a modern and diverse world, by maintaining high standards of scholarship, through expanded collaborations with organizations outside the academy. Focusing on community engaged research perspectives, Bourke (2014: 502), referred to CE as a spectrum of approaches that range from consultation between academic and community partners at the beginning of a research project to modalities of engagement in which both parties are involved in all phases of the process. Going on to build a clearer understanding of CE, Escrigas *et al.* (2014: xxxv) asserted that under the purview of CE, universities move from the agenda of simply increasing the general education of the population and the output of scientific research, towards a model in which university education and research is directed towards achieving specific economic and social objectives. This is done by co-creating and exchanging knowledge and by sharing resources, skills and processes with the public good in mind (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxv).

### 2.3.4 Plurality of community engagement terminologies and practices

Multiple authors have attempted to collate the varying terminologies used under the broad framework of CE. Some of the most commonly used ones in this context, are: civic engagement, public engagement, democratic engagement, engaged scholarship, regional engagement and societal/social engagement (Welch 2016: 38; Farnell 2020: 24). Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton (2009, cited in Welch 2016: 40) viewed 'civic engagement' as a commonly used 'umbrella term', and defined it as a campus-based activity, related to an off-campus issue, problem or organization. Under the realm of civic engagement, the focus is on creating a citizenry (inclusive of students, faculty and members of the larger community) that has the skills, knowledge, political literacy and competencies to be active agents of social change (McIlrath 2014: 41).

Closely related to civic engagement is the term 'public engagement', which includes two-way interactions between communities and external constituencies through the development, exchange and application of knowledge and expertise for mutual benefit (AASCU 2012, cited in Welch 2016: 42). Accordingly, it is characterized as being place-based, interactive, mutually beneficial, and integrated at all levels within an institution (AASCU 2012, cited in Welch 2016: 42). As a term commonly used in the

United Kingdom (UK), public engagement is also interpreted in myriad ways in which the benefits of HEI's functions, particularly research, is shared with the public (NCCPE 2023: para. 4 line 1). In doing so, the term marks a transition towards active 'public engagement with science' rather than 'passive public understanding of science' (Culum 2017, cited in Farnell 2020: 24).

Another related term, 'democratic engagement' signals a shift from the dominant institutional positivist paradigm of faculty expertise within HEI's, to a collaborative co-creation and application of knowledge, with students and community members (Saltmarsh and Hartley 2011, cited in Welch 2016: 41). 'Engaged scholarship' also appears as another commonly used term (often used interchangeably with the term 'scholarship of engagement'). It refers to a form of teaching and research that incorporates the rich knowledge and resources of HEI's in addressing social and community needs (Welch 2016: 45) (this is elaborated in further detail in section 2.6). Further, less commonly used terms such as regional engagement and social engagement, focused more on place based regional development and development of local communities/vulnerable groups, respectively (Farnell 2020: 26).

In addition to the varying terminologies, the framework of CE also encompasses a variety of allied practices, which come under its broad umbrella, such as service-learning, experiential learning, Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), volunteerism, internships, etc. (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 68; Karasik 2020: 114). Thomson *et al.* (2011: 2) referred to service-learning as a pedagogical strategy linking students with communities, thereby connecting educational and civic goals, and has emerged as a method for strengthening relationships between the campus and different community constituencies. Manifested as one of the most common forms of CE, service-learning results in numerous benefits for the students such as: positive perception on community participation, development of critical skills and competencies, ethical commitment, and adapting to new situations and problem solving (Folgueiras *et al.* 2018: 162). With respect to experiential learning, Morris (2020: 1064) interpreted it as comprising contextually rich and concrete experiences, critical reflective observations, context-specific abstract conceptualization, and pragmatic active experimentation.

Quoting the definition provided by the Kellogg Foundation's Community Health Scholars Program; Hall and Tandon (2017a: 8) referred to CBPR as a collaborative approach to enquiry, that equitably involves all partners in the research process, and is aimed at combining knowledge and action for social change. Further, volunteerism referred to a process of engaging students in activities, which emphasized the service being provided and recognized the primary intended beneficiary as the service recipient (Karasik 2020: 120). On the other hand, internships involve engaging students in activities for providing them with a hands-on experience, which enhances their learning and understanding of a particular area of study (Karasik 2020: 120). Undergirding most of such activities and approaches to engagement, is the philosophy and framework of community-based learning, which establishes communities as a legitimate space for learning, and ones who are vested with valuable knowledge (Houston and Lange 2018: 46). This facilitates holistic and integrative learning, which is crucial for substantiating "global/local" CE (Houston and Lange 2018: 46).

## 2.4 Conceptualization of community engagement in higher education

While the preceding section provided a broad overview and general conceptions on CE; this section focuses on exploring and elaborating the understanding of CE in further detail, drawing on the propositions and arguments presented in the global CE literature, through the works of its pioneering champions and contemporary authors. In doing so, it vividly the captures the technical aspects in relation to CE, including its definitions, gamut of practices, its various dimensions and associated challenges.

### 2.4.1 Definition(s) and concept of community engagement

Different scholars, professionals and institutions have defined CE in different ways, in line with their respective contexts (Shawa 2020: 109; Osafo 2021: 77). Among the earliest, most well-known and popularly accepted formal definitions of CE is the one proposed by the Carnegie Foundation, which defined CE as the 'collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Driscoll 2009: 6). Also, referred to as the 'technical definition' of CE; this definition implies an engagement 'with a community';

rather than done ‘to and for’ a community (which is also known as ‘community service’) (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 81). A similar view was proposed by Thakrar (2018: 685), who opined that mere involvement in unidirectional forms of engagement suggests that a university only does engagement ‘to’ its community, as opposed to ‘with’ its community.

Further, Hall and Tandon (2017b: 17) positioned CE as ‘new approaches to the co-construction of knowledge that links community activists to university researchers, and to the engagement of students in community action projects or movements. Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 17) defined CE as a process where universities engage with community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial even if each side benefits in a different way. The aspect of mutuality of benefits, was reiterated by Petter (2017: 432) who attributed CE to be a process of sharing, through which a university gains as much as it contributes, and in the bargain, enhances its own social relevance. Therefore, the central core process of CE involves HEI’s reciprocally engaging with different internal and external stakeholders in sharing valuable resources for the common good (Sheila *et al.* 2021: 1).

Farnell (2020: 6) brought together different ideas, as he provided a more holistic and nuanced understanding of CE in the contemporary context. He defined CE as being a combination of different kinds of engagement (full range of mutually beneficial interactions between HEI’s and communities, as part of teaching, research and service), that HEI’s undertake with different kinds of communities (including public authorities, businesses, schools, civil society and citizens), for addressing multiple societal needs (within the political, economic, cultural, social, technological and environment domain, that influence the quality of life within the society) (Farnell 2020: 6). Similarly, Singh (2017: 4) viewed CE as an ‘umbrella concept’, encompassing several mutually beneficial engagement activities between the university and the community. This argument was reiterated by Hutson *et al.* (2019: 4), who articulated that the term CE represents an umbrella term for different agendas for higher education’s campus-community endeavours, which takes different meanings, as per the institutional context, such as pedagogy to enhance teaching-learning, as an economic strategy etc.

Further, the Academy of Community Engagement Scholarship (ACES) proposed a broader definition of CE, as the work carried out on aspects important to both the university and the community, in a mutually beneficial and collaborative manner, in the form of globally and locally relevant activities that systematically advance practice, teaching and learning, and/or research (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 250). CE may, therefore, be understood as a system through which universities engage with the development needs of the communities (Johnson 2020: 87). Commenting on the transformative capacities of CE, Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong (2021: 1), viewed it as a 'vehicle for bringing about behavioural and environment change', through a process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people, to address issues affecting their well-being, in ways which are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. They, however, added that CE is not a one-off event, and there is sufficient room for strategic planning to create sustainable partnerships and collaborations between the university and the community (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 10).

Therefore, among the multiple definitions of CE presented by various scholars; features that appear as common in most of them are *reciprocity/mutuality* (in terms of benefit, outcomes, goals, trust and respect) and *partnership* (Thakrar 2018: 166). Further, based on a study conducted in 2017, Bhagwan (2017b: 178), called for a need to embed the terms like 'social justice, transformation and citizenship' within the definitions of CE. Therefore, contemporary literature in this field has not only built on the ideas and understanding of CE as proposed by the earlier authors; but has also approached the concept from a more holistic and inclusive perspective, in line with the societal changes and challenges. As a result, CE has gradually evolved in the academic and civil society space, resulting in a variety of definitions and presents a high level of complexity regarding both the meaning of the term and what it entails (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 4). However, when viewing the definitions holistically, it can be said that CE symbolizes some form of relationship between the university and the community, where there is a shared understanding, in terms what is to be done and how, and what goals/objectives are sought, such that both parties would gain from the collaboration (Thakrar 2018: 166). In line with this argument, CE can therefore be referred to as being simultaneously a *method* (involving multiple partnerships and collaborative work); a *principle* (with mutual benefit at its core); and an *objective* (of contributing to societal development) (Farnell 2020: 32).

### 2.4.2 Gamut and features of community engagement

Within the realm of the conceptualization of CE in higher education, many authors hold the view that in line with the multiple definitions of CE (as discussed in the preceding section), there is no uniformity in its conceptualization. Academics conceptualize CE differently across different institutions, depending on their contexts and the nature of the problem they grapple with (Bhagwan 2017b: 180; Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 76; Johnson 2020: 88; Shawa 2020: 109; Dube and Hendricks 2023: 139). Adding to the complexity of its conceptualization is that many activities coalesce or cluster together under the banner of CE (Bhagwan 2017b: 180; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 5). Consistent with this view, CE activities can therefore vary widely, assume multiple forms, and can be implemented within different models (Bhagwan 2017b: 180; Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 76).

Some authors have attempted to bring these diverse range of activities, under what they call as the 'CE spectrum'. For instance, while Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell (2017: 81) positioned service at one end of the spectrum, and CE at the other end; the OECD-CERI classification (1982, cited in Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 49), viewed this spectrum as ranging from 'simple' forms of engagement (putting university facilities at the disposal of the community), to a more 'elaborate' form, where the university engages with the community for co-generating solutions. Further, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 56) opined that CE activities can range from one-dimensional activities to those that are multifaceted, from superficial to deep and embedded and from those that are transactional to transformational. This trajectory of the evolution of CE practices was evidenced by Hazelkorn (2016, cited in Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 59), as beginning from volunteerism to outreach/extension, to service-learning, to knowledge transfer, to knowledge exchange, and finally, including holistic civic engagement.

Mirroring similar views, Rajah (2019: 12) viewed CE as being manifested across different levels of complexity, ranging from simple acts of service to a more complex form of engagement, which involves multiple intelligences and builds on collaborative creativity and innovation. Further, Himmelman (2001, cited in Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy 2022: 108), viewed this to be a 'continuum of CE', which ranged from collaborative betterment (controlled by powerful university actors) to collaborative

empowerment (which involves transformed power relations by giving power in the hands of the communities). In this vein, Denny (2018: 7) cited Dr Sandmann's interpretation of the 'continuum of scholarship', which began with 'traditional academic knowledge generation' (characterized as disciplinary, homogenous, hierarchical, expert-led) and went on to 'engaged knowledge generation' (which was transdisciplinary, applied, hybrid and demand driven). Similar observations were made by Nkoana (2017: 189) who described this as 'weak CE' and 'strong CE', where the former referred to community service and outreach programs of the university (where the communities were passive recipients); while the latter was characterized by collaboration and reciprocity between the two stakeholders. Parallel observations were drawn by Morton (1995, cited in Welch 2016: 38), who described it as 'thin engagement' (reflecting minimal commitment of effort and resources, resulting in minimal integration of educational and civic missions of HEI's) and 'thick engagement' (which connotes meaningful work done for achieving positive social outcomes).

Therefore, it can be said that the varied range of CE activities have been assorted, mainly in terms of the degree of engagement of universities, based on the embeddedness and complexity of the activity (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 5). The common aspect between all forms of CE is that the university extends itself beyond its internal community to its external non-university communities for various purposes and in a variety of different ways (Johnson 2020: 88). However, a deeper level of engagement, that moves from the superficiality of connecting with communities to address their needs; to cultivating respect for community as co-producers of relevant knowledge, is critical to shaping true and meaningful CE (Bhagwan 2017b: 180). Similar views were posed by Farnell (2020: 23), who argued that the principle of mutual benefit, as articulated in most definitions of CE, differentiates it from the one-dimensional notion of universities being viewed as 'enlightened problem solvers' (having a charitable connotation), to that of a 'co-partner' to the community in addressing specific social challenges. Supporting this perspective further, Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong (2021: 2) argued that university-community interactions, where the former is only contracted to do research or provide services, does not satisfy the 'technical definition' of CE, in the absence of any evidence of reciprocity or mutual benefit.

This argument was endorsed by Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell (2017: 81) who opined that there is a difference between the commonly used label of CE and the technical definition of CE, as proposed by the Carnegie Foundation. However, the authors also proposed a unique perspective as they argued that simple collaborations/alterations in project design and processes will allow community service models to move towards CE, which is mutually beneficial and reciprocal (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 83). They cited the example of transforming a one-dimensional relationship of students donating food items to a pantry, into mutually beneficial CE, if the representatives of the pantry can also educate students on issues surrounding hunger (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 83). This aspect of engagement was referred to as being more in-sync with the 'technical definition' of CE proposed by the Carnegie Foundation, where the gains associated with CE were higher (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 82).

Further, Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong (2021: 1) added that CE is about social responsibility of HEI's, as they seek to address the real needs of the community, through the provision of intellectual leadership, by offering their resources and facilities for community use, while collaborating with them for achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Further, within the context of African indigenous knowledge systems, CE is conceptualized as a contemporary counterpart to indigenous pedagogies, and serves as a means for authentic transformation, giving voice and agency to communities, while the student is perceived as an agent for and of change (Rajah 2019: 7). Further, considering the diversity and importance of conceptualization of CE in the contemporary context, Rajah (2019: 3), argued that coherent conceptualisation of CE requires a larger framework of concepts to redefine the role of HEI's, locally and globally.

In this context, Welch (2016: 59) aptly captured the essence of the conceptual understanding of CE and its allied manifestations as being based on two key principles. The *first principle* is consistent with Dr Boyer's perspective in which, the traditional role of knowledge creation by HEI's, transcends its boundaries, in application of the same for community good (Welch 2016: 59). The *second principle* relates to reciprocity of partnerships between HEI's and community, for creating knowledge and resources for the mutual benefit of the academy and the community

(Welch 2016: 59). Finally, Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans (2021: 9), while critically assessing the CE literature in the past couple of decades provided a holistic summation of ideas. They asserted that an engagement, which is completely embedded within all functions of a university, with the explicit aim to take on social responsibility, seems to be considered the ultimate form of CE (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 9). However, they also identified four gaps in the literature to be: (i) limited research on the relationship between CE and societal perceptions, (ii) skewed literature, which is heavily biased towards documenting the experiences from the global North, (iii) absence of community voices in literature, and (iv) lack of studies for assessing the impact of CE activities (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 14).

### 2.4.3 Dimensions of community engagement impacting its conceptualization

Consistent with the varying definitions and conceptual understanding of CE, several authors have proposed different dimensions of CE, which play an important role in its conceptualization at HEI's. With the increasing acknowledgement of centrality of CE in higher education (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 245; Osafo 2021: 75); most of the efforts on framing CE dimensions have focused on the horizontal assortment of CE across the higher education missions and institutional structures and processes, rather than vertical segregation based on degree of embeddedness (Farnell 2020: 63).

Furthermore, Farnell (2020: 33) proposed six thematic dimensions, to conceptualize the full range of forms CE, that can take place at HEI's. They are: (i) teaching and learning, (ii) research, (iii) service and knowledge exchange, (iv) students, (v) university-level engagement and (vi) university level supporting policies. This can be considered to be an alternate version of the classification of CE dimensions proposed by Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 67), which were: (i) institutional engagement-policy and practice for partnership building; (ii) public access to university facilities; (iii) public access to knowledge/dissemination of academic findings; (iv) engaged teaching and learning, engaged research, (v) student engagement and (vi) academic staff engagement. Denny (2018: 5) on the other hand, proposed the four dimensions of CE to be: (i) the pedagogical dimension (improved teaching and learning process) (ii) the mission dimension (the civic mission of higher education), (iii) the partnership

dimension (connecting to the community), and (iv) the epistemological dimension (the production of 'new knowledge', as a result of co-production).

Referring to it as 'domains' of CE, Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell (2017: 76), through a landscape analysis of the various CE activities, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), proposed three domains of CE. They were: (i) internal domain (viewing CE as a tool for student development, with surplus benefits for the community; and characterized by social interaction; social responsibility; belonging; meaningfulness; and critical thinking); (ii) process domain (focusing on the forces/conditions driving CE activities; and characterized by responsiveness, facilitation, outreach, access, diversity/inclusion), and (iii) criteria domain (focusing on the assessment based on the awareness of the product, its benefits and the process whereby which it was created; and characterized by reciprocity/mutually benefit; partnership; collaboration, knowledge development and resource sharing) (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 76-79).

In the context of South African HEI's, Bhagwan (2017b: 171), by way of a qualitative research study, proposed four major thematic dimensions, based onwhich different HEI's conceptualize CE. They were: (i) context (community context, university context); (ii) processes (connecting with communities; engaging for change); (iii) mutually beneficial relationships (partnerships and reciprocity; co-designing solutions), and (iv)knowledge production (co-creation of knowledge, indigenous knowledge) (Bhagwan 2017b: 176-179). In another reference to the conceptualization of CE in the African context, Shawa (2020: 106), proposed that CE should not only involve collaborative knowledge production; but a combined epistemological (drawing on knowledge production) and ontological dimension (derived from a cultivate sense of humanity) of CE is essential for achieving holistic human development and preparing responsible graduates/communities/citizens.

CE in the Australian context was operationalized as 'engaged citizenship' through the nine dimensions of (i) teaching and learning, (ii) curriculum design, (iii) policies, (iv) research, (v) external relations, (vi) social and cultural engagement, (vii) partnerships with school and educational providers, (viii) economic engagement and organization and (ix) participation of students (Winter, Wiseman and Muirhead 2006, cited in Rajah 2019: 2). Further, based on an empirical study conducted in Uganda, for

understanding how engaged stakeholders perceived engagement, Sheila *et al.* (2021: 7) proposed the human behavioural domain of 'Community of Practice (CoP)', as a relevant concept to guide practical CE in HEI's. By way of catering to the needs of all stakeholders and providing an enabling environment for knowledge co-creation, knowledge sharing, collaboration and participation; the concept of CoP, if operationalized within the CE framework, can enable the development of effective, meaningful and impactful CE interventions, addressing all stakeholder needs (Sheila *et al.* 2021: 8).

Considering the aforementioned variations in dimensions/domains of CE, which in turn drives its conceptualization, Rajah (2019: 3) posited that there are different drivers for CE at HEI's in developing countries (mostly characterized by a needs-based model, owing to the situation of marginalized communities), as compared to developed countries (characterized by a mission-based model, where academics collaborate, thereby integrating CE into teaching, learning and research).

### 2.4.4 Challenges related to the conceptualization of community engagement

As shared in the preceding sections, several authors in the field of CE literature have raised the concern regarding the non-uniformity of conceptualization of CE, which differs as per the national/regional/institutional context (Bhagwan 2017b; Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017; Johnson 2020; Shawa 2020). This ambiguity may result in the systemic assimilation of CE into the hegemonic paradigm, and while it may find a place in the philanthropic or "public good" role of higher education; it may retain or even reinforce the power hierarchies that exist between the university and the community, thereby advancing a discourse of disempowerment (Rajah 2019: 5).

Further, under the influence of the neoliberal discourse, CE has often been misunderstood as knowledge transfer and collaboration with large corporations (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 11). As this discourse propounds a marketized view of university education (which prioritizes individual achievements at the cost of public contributions), in the absence of proper guidance and delineation; CE risks being reduced to a mere performative exercise, which are used by faculty members as tick boxes for promotion (Shawa 2020: 113). This perspective found support in the arguments shared by Rajah (2019: 2), who cautioned that within narrow

conceptualisations, CE risks declining towards a means to advance personal agendas for measurable recognition and performance by academic stakeholders (including faculty and students). This then defeats the very purpose of CE, which is built on the principles of cooperation, knowledge democracy and public value (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 2).

A collateral development in this context has been the emergence of a promotional perspective, under the broader conceptualization of CE, which has shifted attention from authentic grassroots transformations (which are its putative focus), to the larger processes driving this activity and its outcomes (Lee 2020: 1565). This has attracted public audiences and funders, trade and professional associations, state legislatures, and federal regulators, in view of sustaining the institution's financial viability (Lee 2020: 1565). As a result, lately, there have been increasing evidence of CE being used to increase public support and revenue stream; and is therefore, viewed as being vulnerable to superficiality and co-optation (Lee 2020: 1581). Further, with the funding of CE activities dependant on outputs, the latter is seen to emerge as an overriding factor in CE activities, with the fundamental characteristic of mutual benefit disappearing into oblivion (Khanyile 2020: 108).

Related to the above, another major challenge which has emerged, pertains to the question of whose interest does CE serve, or for whom it is most beneficial? (Khanyile 2020: 106) In this context, Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans (2021: 11) argued that the answer to this question is closely related to the motivations of universities to engage with local communities. They added that universities, where CE is based on altruistic beliefs can be expected to pay more attention to the impact on local communities, than universities that practice engagement because of external pressures, as the latter may primarily have their own interests in mind (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 11). In such a scenario, questions on exactly who CE activities are supposed to serve, or who is serving, continues to remain elusive in academia (Khanyile 2020: 107). Therefore, Thakrar (2018: 686) argued that it is essential to 're-conceptualize' CE, so as to ensure that CE activities are transformational, rather than being transactional and biased towards the academy.

## 2.5 Institutionalization of community engagement in higher education

This section explores various nuances in relation to the institutionalization of CE in higher education, mainly from the perspective of understanding the concept, enabling factors, approaches and challenges related to the same.

### 2.5.1 Understanding of the concept of institutionalization of community engagement

Institutionalization of CE refers to the formalization of the infusion of CE into the institutional arrangements of HEI's, in ways which are mutually beneficial and accommodates the variations in knowledge systems in both universities and communities (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015b: 15). This aspect differentiates 'institutionalization' from the concept of 'mainstreaming', in a way that, while the latter refers to the embedment of CE across all teaching, learning, research actions, polices, priorities, etc., institutionalization, strives for a broader objective, which is the constitution of an official institutional arrangement for supporting, mainstreaming, guiding and mentoring CE efforts within a university (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015b: 16). The need for the institutionalization of CE stems from the fact that as HEI's begin to prioritize CE in the curriculum, there is a need for a coherent program design and the diffusion of its practices and activities throughout the undergraduate experience (Batten *et al.* 2017: 3). Institutionalization of CE is also essential because sporadic/individual efforts at CE is of limited value, if it is not supported by validated and authorised institutional arrangements (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015b: 16).

However, while much progress has been made with regards to the infusion of CE into the curriculum, by way of practices like service-learning, and outreach and partnerships, full institutionalization of CE into the fabric of the institutions remains to be achieved, and much work still needs to be done (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 53; Sam, Elder and Leftwich 2020: 103). One of the pioneers in this area of work, Holland (2009: 86) attributed this to the complex portrait of organizational change, that is needed for institutionalizing CE. This includes a critical reflection of not only the purpose of HEI's, but also the cultural values essential to the nature of CE itself (Holland 2009: 86). These arguments found support in the work of Boland (2012, cited

in Welch 2016: 63), who asserted that institutionalizing CE is dependent on several factors, such as philosophical and cultural commitment, enabling institutional policies, and reward structures which encourage and reinforce engagement with communities. Along similar lines, Welch (2016: 63) asserted that the institutionalization of CE is a complex four-way process, which involves cultural factors, systemic factors, support from institutional leadership, and support from all relevant stakeholders, including community partners.

In this vein, Cunningham and Smith (2020: 54) suggested that, for CE to be institutionalized, it must be 'transformational', and be embedded in the fabric, culture and priorities of HEI's. Accordingly, CE needs to be evident in the very identity of the institution; in the absence of which, there is a risk of losing momentum or being disregarded altogether with changes in HEI administration (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 54). Consistent with these ideas, contemporary discussions on the institutionalization of CE in higher education have emphasized higher education reform as a goal (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247). This includes transforming the culture of higher education, in ways that it embraces and acknowledges multiple epistemologies and varying forms of scholarship, for enabling CE to thrive (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247). This approach to institutionalization suggests that it is 'not about exploring ways to fit CE into the existing higher education system'; but instead aims at the holistic transformation of higher education culture; rather than securing components that help in embedding CE into the institution's academic culture and fabric (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247). This was also supported by Sandmann, Furco and Adams (2016: 1), who noticed a change from program institutionalization to institutional transformation, while retrospectively examining the field of CE institutionalization.

Expressing support for similar perspectives, Cunningham and Smith (2020: 55) opined that for CE to be truly institutionalized, it must be tied to institutional priorities, which can ensure relevance as well as acceptance/buy-in from HEI administrators and faculty who will then perceive it as being essential. Viewing this process from a holistic perspective and for ensuring sustainability of CE initiatives and its effective institutionalization, Sam, Elder and Leftwich (2020: 103) proposed changes on two levels. They were: (i) *first-order changes* that are structural or incremental (e.g.,

policies or operating procedures), and (ii) more challenging *second order changes*, which require a paradigm shift in the underlying values and culture (Sam, Elder and Leftwich 2020: 103). Therefore, the process of institutionalizing CE is not an easy or a straightforward one, and in fact can be complex and messy, as it calls for changing routines and ways of thinking (Farner 2019: 147). However, if academic stakeholders can embrace this messiness as a norm, they may find utility in adaptive strategies that can enhance and even strengthen the connections between academic missions and the public value of higher education (Farner 2019: 150).

### 2.5.2 Factors enabling the institutionalization of community engagement

Among the earliest literary works on the institutionalization of CE is the scholarly work of Bringle and Hatcher (2000: 273), who argued in favour of the advancement of service learning as a form of CE and its institutionalization. They asserted that it can positively impact faculty work, enrich student learning and improve university-community relationships (Bringle and Hatcher 2000: 273). With respect to variables enabling institutionalization of CE in HEI's, and considering the multi-faceted nature of CE, Bringle and Hatcher (2000: 282) proposed certain key variables for enabling the institutionalization of engaged practices in HEI's. They were: (i) institutional planning (backed by broad-based faculty support and institutional commitment); (ii) creation of campus infrastructure (in the form of a centralized office) for supporting CE practices (by way of technical assistance); (iii) logistical support; (iv) monetary incentives; (v) provision of rewards and recognition; (vi) identification of institutional responsibility of the professional staff in such offices (which can help advance strategic CE planning); and (vii) strong leadership support (backed by provision of adequate funding) (Bringle and Hatcher 2000: 282).

Similar ideas were proposed by Barbara Holland in 2006, (also among the group of first set of authors to describe and interpret the dimensions, approaches, and levels of institutional commitment to CE) for facilitating institutional planning, decision-making and evaluation, in the form of a matrix (Farner 2019: 148). This matrix identified seven institutional components (mission; promotion, tenure, hiring; organizational structure; student involvement; faculty involvement; community involvement; campus publications) and related them to four levels of integration (low relevance, medium relevance, high relevance, and full integration). In addition to facilitating

institutionalization, these components also assisted the leadership in determining the actual state of engagement in a particular unit, or within the larger institution, relative to their goals for the full institutionalization of CE (Farner 2019: 149).

Consistent with the above, Furco (2014: 254) identified another set of components, which when fully put in place, contributed towards institutionalizing CE in HEI's. These components were organized within five dimensions: (i) philosophy and mission, (ii) faculty involvement and support, (iii) student involvement and support, (iv) community partnerships and (v) institutional support (Furco 2014: 264). Corroborating similar ideas, Sandmann, Thornton and Jaeger (2009, cited in Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 17) proposed twelve factors as enabling the institutionalization of CE in HEI's: (i) leadership; (ii) coordinating infrastructure; (iii) internal and external fundraising, (iv) assessment and measurement; (v) planning; (vi) faculty development; (vii) community voice; (viii) professional recognition; (ix) curricular embeddedness; (x) student voice; (xi) engaged scholarships and (xii) partnerships. This clearly links with the ideas proposed by eminent scholars as discussed earlier.

Prominent contemporary literature in this context has attempted to advance the understanding of institutionalization of CE in higher education by proposing both themes/approaches which can enable institutionalization, and its assessment modalities which can help gauge the level/depth of institutionalization at HEI's (Batten *et al.* 2017: 34; Farner 2019: 150; Hutson *et al.* 2019: 10; Bhagwan 2020: 50; Cunningham and Smith 2020: 55). Sam, Elder and Leftwich (2020: 101), through a research study conducted at the Rowan University of the USA, argued that, for the entirety of engaged scholarship to be institutionalized, smaller changes and innovations are required on four fronts: (i) mission, (ii) faculty reward structure and process, (iii) logistical support, and (iv) graduate student socialization. However, the authors opined that it is possible for all four areas to be in different stages of advancement and need not be fully operationalized for enabling institutionalization. However, CE priorities must be identified, cultivated, and integrated in ways such that the entire institution is aware of the priority and works toward integrating CE experiences in the academic framework in meaningful ways (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 5).

Further, through a qualitative research study conducted at six universities in South Africa, Bhagwan (2020: 41) proposed eight salient themes that were critical to enabling

the institutionalisation of CE. They were: (i) mission, vision and policies; (ii) embedment of CE within teaching and research; (iii) involvement of academics; (iv) student involvement; (v) building an institutional culture; (vi) institutional support; (vii) community partnerships and, (viii) rewarding engagement. She also articulated that all proposed themes were interrelated in a synergistic way, and which when integrated into the academic framework, over a sustained period, can enable institutionalization as opposed to linear, sporadic efforts (Bhagwan 2020: 50). Mirroring similar ideas, Hutson *et al.* (2019: 11) collated another set of enabling factors driving institutionalization efforts at HEI's. They were: (i) inter-departmental collaboration for achieving holistic organizational change; (ii) support from institutional leadership, both verbal and tangible, by way of resource allocation and incentives for faculty (tenure and promotion), (iii) student's credits and rewards, and (iv) enabling community voice in institutional engagement efforts (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11).

Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini (2019: 11) proposed a broader perspective with respect to sustained institutionalization of CE at HEI's by way of integrating CE at different levels: practical, strategic and political. They, therefore, accorded importance to the alignment of various factors at different levels, including student orientations, institutional preconditions, support by political and civil society organizations and national policy orientations (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 12). This perspective was corroborated by Bivens, Haffenden and Hall (2015: 19) who proposed a framework for institutionalizing CE practices at HEI's, comprising of four main components. They were: (i) policy (referring to supportive governmental policies at provincial/national levels, and institutional policies); (ii) infrastructure (institutional structures for coordinating, managing and steering CE activities); (iii) mainstreaming in teaching and research (making CE practice opportunities available to all faculty and students) and, (iv) improving university accessibility, both physically and institutionally (by opening up university resources/services for use by communities and making all academic knowledge available in public domain) (Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 19).

### 2.5.3 Approaches to institutionalizing community engagement

In addition to proposing enablers and strategies for promoting the institutionalization of CE in HEI's, there is also a big component in the institutionalization literature (much

recent in origin), which documents the various approaches adopted by different HEI's to institutionalize CE (Batten *et al.* 2017: 32; Farner 2019: 149; Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 10; Cunningham and Smith 2020: 55). In line with the ideas presented above, institutionalization of CE at HEI's calls for an 'institutional transformation' process, which is integrative of *academic, organizational and cultural change* (Holland and Malone 2019: 3). The new approaches adopted by HEI's for institutionalizing CE processes support this argument.

*Academic change* involves transformation of processes of teaching, learning and research (Furco 2010: 379). In this relation, Batten *et al.* (2017: 2) makes the case of 'curricular mapping' (creating inventories of all curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities), as a powerful catalyst for institutionalizing CE practices. They argued that the knowledge gained from this mapping can be used to further enhance existing CE programming, develop new courses, and identify similar other opportunities (Batten *et al.* 2017: 9). Further, in terms of academic change involving research processes, adoption of practices built on the principle of collaboration and mutually beneficial university-community research partnerships (such as CBPR) as part of regular academic curriculum, also plays an important role in institutionalizing CE processes at HEI's (Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 13; Lepore, Hall and Tandon 2021: 352). Busch *et al.* (2019: 3) viewed participatory approaches that collaboratively engage with stakeholders for the purpose of knowledge creation/problem solving for achieving actionable social change outcomes as collaborative change research, evaluation and design (CCRED). The organic connections between CE practices and CCRED plays an important role in strengthening community voices in such collaborative relationships (Holland and Malone 2019: 4). This aspect of strengthening of community voices in turn facilitates the institutionalization of CE practices, as proposed by Sandmann, Thornton and Jaeger (2009: 2).

In terms of *organizational change* processes adopted for approaching institutionalization of CE practices, prominent literary works illustrate various strategies incorporated by HEI's to facilitate the CE institutionalization process. Documenting the example of the University of Louisville, Cunningham and Smith (2020: 55) proposed the development of 'CE plans' by the HEI's academic and administrative units, which can serve as a strategic guidance roadmap to facilitate CE,

thereby enabling its institutionalization across the institution. These plans can guide CE efforts within the institution, addressing the core principles outlined in the institution's strategic plan and mission, thereby furthering the cause of the institutionalization of CE, while also serving as a CE assessment tool (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 65). Further, while acknowledging the adaptive challenges involved in the CE institutionalization process, Farner (2019: 150) proposed a unique 'braid model' encompassing organizational and individual actions and motivations. This model acknowledged the complexity in achieving full institutionalization of CE practices, and therefore, brings together individual and organizational perspectives, presented as individual strands of the braid (such as mission, organizational structure, leadership/individual decision makers, etc.) (Farner 2019: 150).

Finally, with respect to *cultural change* processes adopted by HEI's to approach CE institutionalization, one of the popular aspects which appears in literature is the promotion of open scholarship or community engaged scholarship, which is one of the pre-requisites for attaining knowledge democracy and institutionalizing CE in a meaningful way (Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 10; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 28; Abbott and Tiffen 2019: 1). Transforming the culture of higher education as an approach to institutionalization, has been strongly endorsed by eminent scholars, in their seminal literary works (Furco 2014: 264; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247; Sandmann, Furco and Adams 2016: 9). In contributing towards transforming scholarship towards becoming more holistic and by broadening its scope, influence and impact beyond the traditional modes of academic practice; the open scholarship movement reflects the cultural change process in HEI's towards CE practices, thereby facilitating its institutionalization (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247; Abbott and Tiffen 2019: 1).

### 2.5.4 Challenges related to institutionalization of community engagement

While much progress has been made at the institutional level for advancing CE along the institutionalization continuum, pertinent issues and challenges remain to be addressed (Furco 2014: 264). Among the most critical challenge is the acceptance of CE by academics, as a legitimate knowledge activity (i.e. as a 'normal' part of teaching and research), especially considering that transforming academic practices is a long-term process (Farnell 2020: 8). This makes the process of institutionalization a challenging affair, which requires time, coordination and support in equal proportions

(Farnell 2020: 8). Other challenges in this context include the uneven quality of community engaged courses (for instance, service-learning, internships, etc.) being offered across the institution and doubts regarding the acceptance of community engaged scholarship of junior faculty by their influential peers (Furco 2014: 266). Further, while large, decentralized and entrepreneurial nature of campuses may spark CE activities; it comes only at the expense of the capacities of the community members (Furco 2014: 266).

Another challenge is related to the aspect that the measurement of the impacts of CE on students, faculty, the institution and the community remains a difficult proposition, as engagement metrics in this regard has not yet been developed and standardized, owing to slow institutional buy-in and support (Furco 2014: 266). In view of this, institutionalizing CE will continue to pose a challenge for campus leaders until universal metrics for defining, measuring, and assessing engagement is developed (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 13). This perspective was supported by Farnell (2020: 8), who pointed towards the complexity of management of CE (considering the diverse forms it takes under different academic disciplines), which is further complicated by the difficulty of measuring it quantitatively, considering the nature of context-specificity of CE. Lee (2020: 1567) posited that the absence of validation of CE initiatives through continuous institutional assessment, resulted in the CE efforts appearing as shallow window-dressing, rather than meaningful, institutional priorities.

Additional challenges towards sustained institutionalization of CE activities involve expectation to build a CE model, which is inclusive of all stakeholders, which is a challenging task (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11). Further, the absence of inter-department collaborations, including that between academic and student affairs (one which is critical in the implementation of CE across all units (including divisions, disciplines, faculty and staff) in the institution, also adds to the institutionalization challenge (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11). Further, institutionalization of CE also emerges as being problematic, because: (i) being a new practice, it faces resistance, and ii) it incorporates an adaptive challenge, one that is systemic, involving multiple stakeholders and one which requires changes in behavioural and technical strategies (Farner 2019: 148). Challenges with respect to integrating and institutionalizing CE

are also presented in the form of paucity of resources and lack of supportive institutional infrastructure (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 3).

Further, the lack of conceptual clarity on CE and what it entails, also contributes to the institutionalization challenge (Moore and Ward 2010, cited in Bhagwan 2020: 38; Sam, Elder and Leftwich 2020: 103). The sustainability of CE initiatives emerges as yet another concern with respect to its institutionalization (Vargiu, Cocco and Ghibellini 2019: 16; Sam, Elder and Leftwich 2020: 102). Lastly, Watermeyer (2019: 220) raised the issue of 'social problems' of institutionalization, where CE within HEI's suffer from gender and career-stage imbalances, as a vast majority of academics and professional service staff supporting CE are early career females, who are vulnerable and prone to paternalistic bias and exploitation by higher education leadership.

## 2.6 Operationalization of community engagement in higher education

In continuation to the preceding sections on the conceptualizations and institutionalization of CE in HEI's and within the context of this study, it is also pertinent to explore its positioning in the academia. This section, therefore, sheds light on some related ideas, particularly in the form of operationalization of CE, its manifestations in academic scholarship, global innovations in this context and some of the associated challenges in this regard.

### 2.6.1 Understanding the operationalization of community engagement in academia

While CE envisages activities aimed at benefitting the society, it essentially includes those which are integrated into the core academic framework and in the higher functions of teaching, research and service, for generating new knowledge for public welfare (Welch 2016: 45; Franz 2019: 179). In this framework, Bringle and Hatcher (2011, cited in Welch 2016: 45) proposed four distinguishing features that characterizes such engagement, which are: (i) engagement should be scholarly, (ii) it should integrate the academic functions of teaching, research and service, (iii) it should be reciprocal and mutually beneficial, and (iv) it must encompass and reflect civil democracy. This form of operationalizing CE in academia has also been referred

to as the ‘scholarship of engagement’ (SoE) or ‘engaged scholarship’ or ‘community-engaged scholarship’; a term widely attributed to Dr Ernest Boyer (Welch 2016: 44).

However, Boyer (1990: 16) did not actually use this term in his landmark book, ‘*Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate’*; where he introduced the scholarship(s) of discovery, integration, application and teaching. Rather, he introduced the term SoE as an overarching umbrella for the four types of scholarship he proposed in his 1990 book, during a keynote address at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in the year 1997 (Welch 2016: 44). In this perspective, SoE broadly refers to the scholarship resulting from the collaborative and mutually beneficial partnership between university member(s) (i.e. faculty, staff, and/or student) and external non-academic partner(s) or communities (Denny 2018: 7). Such partnerships are aimed at addressing public issues and creating civically engaged students and faculty, while enhancing the public value of higher education, in creating a more diverse HEI environment (Denny 2018: 7).

In this light, Welch (2016: 35-36) enlisted three key components which build the essence of SoE: (i) community based work by faculty and students need to be based on empirically tested best practices, (ii) such work should be driven by academic goals and public welfare objectives, such that the knowledge generated paves the way for public benefit, and lastly (iii) the new knowledge generated or derived is adopted and applied by community partners, which is enabled through authentic dissemination of the emergent new knowledge. Further, referring to it as ‘community engaged scholarship’, Magaiza (2014: 63) described it as collaborative teaching, research and service activities undertaken in partnerships between university staff and community, that combines CE (reciprocal partnerships and knowledge sharing for public welfare) with academic scholarship (inquiry based disciplinary knowledge). Proposing an alternate but related view, Gibbs and Poisat (2020: 84) and Sheila *et al.* (2021: 7) viewed community engaged scholarship (involving the sub-domains of educator, learner and community) as an enabler of CE, as it drives creativity and innovative thinking.

Further, Hart, Daniels and September-Brown (2023: 234) described SoE as the fifth form of scholarship, in addition to the four forms of scholarship, which they called as the scholarship of teaching and learning, scholarship of research, scholarship of

integration, and scholarship of application. In this view, SoE represents the integrative institutionalization of CE, which paves the road towards transformation and scholarship led societal impact (Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 234). Therefore, SoE embraces reciprocal sharing of knowledge, emanating from diverse cultural contexts and incorporates these aspects into teaching, learning and research (September-Brown, Daniels and Hart 2023: 268). In this way, SoE both challenges and differs from conventional, mainstream scholarship (disciplinary, homogenous, peer reviewed, expert led process), in being mutually beneficial interactions built on the core academic functions (Barker 2004: 125; Sandmann 2008: 96; Sandmann, Saltmarsh and O'Meara 2008: 48; Sam, Elder and Leftwich 2020: 86). Further, Welch (2016: 45) also stated that such attributes of engaged scholarship (which mobilizes the knowledge and resources of HEI's for addressing social and community needs) differentiates it from other participatory forms of scholarly enquiry as in anthropology or ethnography (which embodies activities, primarily aimed at adding to the existing body of disciplinary knowledge).

### 2.6.2 Manifestations of community engagement in academic scholarship

The preceding section provides evidence on how aspects of engaged scholarship entail the intersection between CE and the core academic functions of teaching, research and service. This section explores more detailed and finer nuances of such engaged teaching, engaged research and engaged service practices, through the lens of various scholarly literature, which has documented similar practices globally.

#### 2.6.2.1 Engaged teaching

Among one of the earliest scholars to shed light on this aspect, Furco (2010: 385) viewed engaged teaching or community-engaged teaching as being built on the premise that community as a rich landscape provides a great opportunity for strengthening student's education, and while engaging with them, students can give back to the community as well. Proposing similar views, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 62) posited that engaged teaching involves academic staff, students and community in activities, which are mutually beneficial and based on a respectful collaboration. Interactions emerging from such activities not only addresses community needs and enhances their well-being; but also deepens student's academic and civic learning,

thereby enriching the whole teaching, learning architecture at the institution (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 62). Engaged teaching denotes academically based CE courses or variations of curricular, co-curricular teaching-learning strategies, which include (but are not limited to) service learning, practice-based learning, experiential learning, etc. (Furco 2010: 385; Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 62; Denny 2018: 7).

Through such experiences, engaged teaching enriches learning and enhances engagement opportunities, which paves the way for knowledge transformation, rather than a simple transference of information, as happens in traditional teaching practices (Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 232). In doing so, engaged teaching processes and strategies facilitates innovation, as it challenges students to engage in critical reflection, on the academic content as well as the real-life situation in the community, thereby enabling social transformation (Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 232). Therefore, engaged teaching denotes a paradigm shift towards a Mode 2 approach to curricular teaching and learning for the contextual co-creation of knowledge, to solve social challenges, which not only builds student's academic competencies, but also enhances their personal values and nurtures a spirit of social responsibility (Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 232; Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 5).

#### 2.6.2.2 Engaged research

Engaged research or community-engaged research is an umbrella term for a wide variety of research-based activities and methods (Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera 2023: 3). These include community-based research, collaborative research, participatory action research, partnership research, community-based participatory research (CBPR), etc. (De Santis *et al.* 2019: 151). However, among all of them, CBPR emerges as the most well-established and popular method (initially applied in the field of health, and now expanding to other domains of human development) and has gradually gained prominence as a potential tool for providing sustainable solutions to critical societal challenges (Hall and Tandon 2017a: 7; Luger *et al.* 2020, cited in Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera 2023: 3). Further, engaged research entails transdisciplinary, collaborative research projects/enterprises with the community, wherein the latter participates not as research subjects, but as research partners or co-researchers/co-investigators, and engages in active knowledge transfer and

exchange (Furco 2010: 383; Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 64; Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 5). As partners in the research process, communities also bring in other benefits, which includes, helping investigators access hard-to-reach/marginalized populations and securing their trust and buy-in, while also bringing greater legitimacy to research investigations (Furco 2010: 383).

Therefore, an engaged research approach values collaboration between all partners (universities, local communities, other relevant stakeholders), to co-create contextually relevant knowledge that can find sustainable solutions, by utilizing the knowledge and expertise of all participants in the process (Hall and Tandon 2017a: 7; Sibhensana and Maistry 2023: 197). This makes evident, stark differences between a traditional research approach and engaged research approach (Hall and Tandon 2017a: 7; Sibhensana and Maistry 2023: 197). While the former is mostly top-down and dictated by academics; the latter is a more democratic and collaborative form of research, which is undertaken in partnership with the very community stakeholders, who are impacted by the problem at hand (Hall and Tandon 2017a: 7; Sibhensana and Maistry 2023: 197). This also involves joint framing of research problems, which are also in accordance with community needs (Hall and Tandon 2017a: 7). However, undertaking such partnership-based research necessitates the adoption of new pedagogies, learning new competencies, devising new ways of organizing and exploring new knowledge, along with recognizing practitioner-based/indigenous knowledge(s) (FICCI 2017: 13; Lepore, Hall and Tandon 2021: 359).

If this can be achieved, engaged research can offer numerous benefits. For instance, Sibhensana and Maistry (2023: 197) viewed it as a viable tool for advancing CE that results in sustainable community development. On the other hand, Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong (2021: 2), perceived engaged research as enabling students to become knowledgeable and active citizens in their respective communities, countries and also in the world. Therefore, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 64) regarded engaged research as translating into both educational and community development outcomes.

#### 2.6.2.3 Engaged service

Engaged service or community engaged service refers to the collaboration between academic staff and students, that results in the provision of beneficial services, which

improves the quality of life of local and global communities (Denny 2018: 7; Cunningham and Smith 2020: 55; Farnell 2020: 40). Accordingly, it includes a range of service and engagement activities such as community service experiences, staff volunteer programs, and engagement of faculty as expert consultants for providing technical assistance, legal advice or other discipline related services, for serving the needs of the community (Furco 2010: 386; Doberneck, Glass and Schweitzer 2010, cited in Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 52). On similar lines, the Carnegie Classification of CE in the USA also viewed engaged services as including activities such as organizing community training programs, establishing community learning centres, providing evaluation support for communities, etc. (Farnell 2020: 40). However, Denny (2018: 7) posited that while such engaged service activities are performed by academic staff and students, they may or may not be related to an academic program. Similar views were proposed by Farnell (2020: 40) who outlined that such activities carried out in the form of community projects, programs and initiatives, mostly remain supplementary to core teaching and research activities.

Furco (2010: 386), while providing support to these arguments in stating that such engaged service activities are not necessarily linked to academic activities at an institution; also offered a unique and alternate perspective on the same. He asserted that despite the extra-curricular status, members of an engaged campus accord great value to the engaged service activities and take great pride in the contributions that such activities make in the community (Furco 2010: 386). Further, FICCI (2017: 15) viewed the dimension of engaged service as critical to developing the attribute of active citizenship in students, marked by humanistic values of empathy, respect and tolerance, which helps develop the spirit of social consciousness and responsibility in them. Such ‘active citizens’ seek solutions to contemporary challenges, with the objective of fostering social welfare, thereby emerging as innovative and empathetic change makers (FICCI 2017: 15).

### 2.6.3 Global innovations with respect to operationalization of community engagement

Considering the aforementioned context, global CE literature documents innovative examples of operationalization of CE or the application of engaged scholarship, as is being practiced world-wide. Accordingly, these innovations document examples of

how HEI's have attempted to integrate the practice of CE within the regular academic framework.

With respect to engaged teaching, in the context of Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, in the USA; Houston and Lange (2018: 44) proposed a unique conceptualization of CE, which they called as 'global/local CE', for helping students develop skills and dispositions of reciprocity, reflexivity and place-based and interdependent knowledge production. They opined that global/local CE created the context for meaningful collaboration and knowledge co-production, which are the pre-requisites for crafting a more just and peaceful future (Houston and Lange 2018: 47). Further, documenting the experience arising out of an evaluation exercise of a 'Student Philanthropy and Community Engagement Program (SPCEP)' at the Oakland University, USA; Benz *et al.* (2020: 18) advocated the importance and value of curricular integration of CE. They outlined the benefits of such a program, as improved teaching-learning experiences by increasing student's engagement with the knowledge and needs of the local community, leading to academic and social benefits (Benz *et al.* 2020: 18). Another example of curricular innovation in terms of CE embedment was evidenced by Quillinan *et al.* (2018: 113), within the context of Irish higher education. Here, they shared the experience emerging from a two year 'Community Wellness Empowerment, Leadership and Lifeskills (CWell) programme', which represented a curriculum, co-designed by the community and university stakeholders, and which prioritized the needs identified by the local community, while simultaneously satisfying the academic requirements of the university accreditation (Quillinan *et al.* 2018: 115).

In the context of engaged research, Burman (2019: 199), documented an engaged research initiative between the University of Limpopo and the Waterberg welfare society in the same province. This research partnership, built on imperfect knowledge and serendipity, was the key to developing resilience strategies for achieving the shared vision of addressing and mitigating the impact of wicked problems in rural South Africa (Burman 2019: 209). Further, Lepore and King (2023: 59) drew upon their experiences of international collaborative research initiatives in the global North, while positioning it as a means for the co-creation of knowledge, by weaving together scientific and traditional knowledge systems for solving community problems. Here,

they also highlighted the importance of ensuring reciprocity, commitment and benefit to community partners, and to understand when to leave them in peace (Lepore and King 2023: 67). In the South African context, Wood *et al.* (2023: 183) narrated their engaged research experiences under the Interprofessional Health Education (IHE) project. This project entailed mutually beneficial research partnerships between health science students and the rural community to improve local health outcomes (Wood *et al.* 2023: 180). However, they also proposed the need for more dialogues to bridge the knowledge cultures of academia and community, in order to make such processes more ethical, inclusive and sustainable (Wood *et al.* 2023: 202).

In the context of engaged service, Kavatekar and Vijaya (2017b: 25), through a study conducted at Jain University, India; advocated for the integration of community service in teaching methodologies and in the curriculum. They based their recommendation on the argument that such an integration results in positive transformation in the personalities, attitudes and behaviours of students, thereby making them more civically engaged and socially responsible (Kavatekar and Vijaya 2017b: 25). Similar views were proposed much earlier by Bender (2007: 129) in the South African context. Here, she cited the example of the White Paper 3 of the South African Department of Education, which called for the integration of community service programs in higher education, for fulfilling the latter's commitment to public welfare and also for fulfilling its social responsibilities (Bender 2007: 129).

### 2.6.4 Challenges with respect to operationalization of community engagement

One of the most prominent challenges with respect to the operationalization of CE in higher education can be attributed to the unidirectional engagement and bias towards the university, where dominant forms of CE continue to be manifested in an outreach mode; with very little emphasis on the 'mutuality of benefits' (Thakrar 2018: 680). Much of this aspect is related to the absence of institutionalization/strategic policy and dedicated resources for CE efforts (Constantinou 2020: 1; Johnson 2020: 91). Further, fragmented and uncoordinated approaches and efforts with respect to CE has become commonplace, with the latter not functioning as an integral component of, but parallel to the higher education functions of teaching, research and service (Quillinan *et al.* 2018: 114; Rajah 2019: 3). The absence of a clear conceptualization adds to the operationalization challenges and as a result, despite being an accepted practice; CE,

when compared to the traditional roles of teaching and research, remains contested and is often viewed as voluntary or even peripheral (remaining ad-hoc and unlinked to academic projects) (Shawa 2020: 105). Consistent with this perspective, the implicit conception among HEI's that CE is peripheral to the teaching and researching roles of faculty members, also impedes universities' ability to challenge social disparities (Shawa 2020: 106).

Further, in addition to the lack of time and adequate resources; absence of official recognition of CE efforts by faculty makes it reliant on their goodwill, which in turn impacts the sustainability of such efforts (Quillinan *et al.* 2018: 120). In addition to this, and despite the paradigmatic shift towards the third mission, academics and students continue to grapple with the complexities of how to engage, within this emerging area of scholarship (Bhagwan 2019: 2). Adding to these challenges are the disciplinary rigidities of the academia and the adversities experienced by under-resourced communities (particularly in the global South), which emerge as major barriers to the implementation of CE in higher education (Bhagwan 2019: 2; Tandon and Pandey 2019: 52). Holland and Malone (2019: 2) added that while engaged universities have strived to ensure that engagement with communities is mutually beneficial; the lack of a cohesive and sustained agenda of engagement has sometimes led to mixed results for all involved.

Johnson (2020: 94), through a research study in the South African context, enlisted six barriers to the implementation of CE in HEI's, which includes, (i) inadequate funding, (ii) the lack of a shared understanding of CE, (iii) variation in personal perspectives on CE (especially higher education leadership), (iv) workload pressures on faculty/staff, (v) lack of commitment to CE (resulting in non-implementation), and (vi) unequal power relations in university-community partnerships (involving aspects of exploitation of non-academic community). Another major challenge that risks CE being subjected to academic bias is that the outputs of studies from CE activities are often commercialised to benefit the universities and champions of the engagement, while depriving the communities who shared their information and knowledge (and who are often not acknowledged or given access to research outputs) (Khanyile 2020: 110). Similar concerns were raised by Peacock (2012: 12), who viewed this from the

lens of an ethical challenge, especially when conducted within asymmetric economic, social, cultural conditions, which further reinforces power inequities.

Corroborating the above-mentioned perspectives, Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans (2021: 12) summarized three main challenges with respect to the operationalization of CE. They are: (i) overt emphasis on academic disciplines (rather than interdisciplinary work); (ii) increased focus on competition in higher education, with respect to international rankings (which blurs the attention on CE, as it does not contribute to the former; and, (iii) concerns regarding the time investment, logistics involved, requirement of capacity building and learning of new skills, and the lack of clear procedures for documentation and evaluation, resulting in decreased participation by staff who do not have a personal motivation to pursue CE (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 12).

## 2.7 Contemporary realities and the role of higher education: Indian context

Having explored the global dimensions of the contemporary realities and the role of higher education in the same; this section now shifts attention to the Indian context, which is the focus of the study at hand. It explores the literature in relation to broader realities of the Indian society and the role that Indian higher education plays, both from a historical and a contemporary perspective.

### 2.7.1 Current Indian social scenario and the dynamics of Indian higher education institutions

Positioned at the cusp of societal transformation, India faces an exclusive blend of challenges and opportunities (Singh 2020: 13). While it stands at an unenvious rank of 132 out of 191 countries in the Human Development Report, released by the UNDP (2022: 26); India ranks 123 out of 161 countries in the Commitment to Reducing Inequalities (CRI) index (Walker *et al.* 2022: 55). Earlier, Tandon (2014: 4) pointed towards the multiplicity of crises faced by the Indian society on several fronts, such as poverty, marginalization and deprivation, new forms of social exclusion, urban poverty, environmental degradation, and conflict and violence, all of which have emerged in the past decade. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further worsened these

already grim realities (Hall and Tandon 2020a: 1). However, co-existing with these challenges is the huge opportunity in the form of demographic dividends which India is currently witnessing (Singh 2020: 14). Therefore, while the global population ages rapidly, especially in the developed world (UN 2023: 18), India with a relatively young population (with a median age of 28.4 years), is poised to retain the position of being the largest provider of human resources in the world (Ernst & Young India 2023: para. 2 line 1). This is especially given the fact that while India entered the demographic dividend opportunity window in 2005-06, it will continue to be there till 2055-56 (Dethe 2023: para. 9 line 1)

Amidst this reality, Indian HEI's emerge as important actors on two counts: *firstly*, India's demographic reality, and the increasing pool of young population, and universities being regarded as critical in shaping human behaviour and improving inter-personal relations; and *secondly,* in their capacities as public good and sites for knowledge creation (Singh 2020: 14; 2021: 118). However, literature points towards some of the key challenges/issues faced by Indian HEI's in the contemporary context, which constrains their functioning and performance on several fronts. Here, four sets of challenges emerge as most critical. The *first* relates to the 'issue of massification' of Indian higher education (Singh 2017: 2; Sharma 2019: para. 1 line 3). As per the All-India Survey on Higher Education 2020-21, the Indian higher education sector comprises of 1113 universities, 43796 colleges, and 11296 standalone institutions (Ministry of Education 2021: xiii). Witnessing an exponential increase in the number of HEI's across the country, important questions on its quality are being raised by several quarters (Sharma 2019: para. 1 line 4; Singh 2020: 16). Further, Singh (2017: 2) added that with the advent of massification, many Indian HEI's are being privately owned, and are operated as business outfits. With the increase in business like practices and the universities responding to the needs of the corporate world or vested interests, questions regarding their social relevance, identity and the purpose of universities and the knowledge or education imparted therein, are starting to be raised, similar to global developments (Tandon 2014: 6; Singh 2017: 2). This constitutes the *second* challenge of Indian HEI's which is positioned within the debates of its 'public versus quasi-public versus private character' (Ranjan and Gupta 2020: 50).

Complicating the scheme of things further, has been the recent structural functional issues, that have plagued Indian HEI's in the contemporary context (Singh 2020: 16). This constitutes the *third* challenge. Internal challenges of Indian HEI's include a cramped institutional vision and excessive rigidity (both structural and disciplinary), coupled with an ivory tower strategy and siloed approach of the three missions of teaching, research and service (with service being perceived primarily as a peripheral function), which obliviates any scope for positive transformations (Raj Kumar 2017: 7; Singh 2020: 14; Shankar 2021: 81). As a result, they have also not fully absorbed the global realities of knowledge creation and their relevance for social transformation (Raj Kumar 2017: 34). Related to this is the 'ideological issue' which has problematized higher education culture in India and has emerged as the fourth point of concern for Indian HEI's (Shankar 2021: 87). Referring to this *fourth* challenge, Shankar (2021: 81) asserted that, because of the 'cultural alienation' of Indian HEI's, they continue to reel under the influence of colonization, while approaching and pursuing educative practices from an elitist perspective, divorced from the local context and identity (Shankar 2021: 81). Such an epistemicide, caused by the colonial regime has been killing the local and diverse knowledge systems, having a detrimental impact on the process of knowledge construction and dissemination (Hall and Tandon 2017b: 6; Shankar 2021: 82; Tandon and Hall 2021: 300).

### 2.7.2 Historical and contemporary perspectives on the philosophy of Indian higher education and its role in society

In light of the pervasive challenges and consistent with global perspectives, foundational questions on what a university or HEI is, and its role in society is, have begun to resurface in the Indian context too (Shankar 2021: 80). In the broadest vision, a university is a place to enable study and learning about multiple facets of existence, ecosystems, diverse human cultures, the interconnectedness among them, and their connections with the learner (Shankar 2021: 80). The university-society connect is therefore, an intrinsic part of this basic purpose (Shankar 2021: 80).

Historically, higher education in India has integrated knowledge generation and acquisition of skills with larger social issues (Singh and Tandon 2015: 114). In ancient India, globally acclaimed and prestigious Indian universities like the Nalanda and the Taxila, placed huge importance on their relationship with society, as they were built on

traditional ideas of CE, and functioned in tune with the needs and requirements of the society (Tandon 2008: 12; Singh and Tandon 2015: 114). The singular aspect of ancient Indian educational objectives was that it was always oriented towards the wellbeing of mankind and was global in all respects (Dutta 2020: 172).

This premise was reflected in the Gandhian philosophy of education (proposed in the early 20th century), which can be said to be one of the most important influences on the perceptions of Indian higher education in the contemporary context (Sharma and Singh 2019: 43). Mahatma Gandhi was an ardent supporter of the fact that higher education should in one way or the other, relate to national necessities and the benefit of the society, while articulating that education should be built on 'engaged teaching and learning processes', rooted in the local context (Sharma and Singh 2019: 46). He particularly focused on the application of theory in practice, while using dialogical, co-learning, participatory and problem-oriented methods, for serving societal needs (Sharma and Singh 2019: 46). Complementing this, has been the perspectives emerging from other eminent Indian educationists like Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore, who voiced their opinion in favour of the intrinsic interconnections between education and society, and the social responsibilities of Indian HEI's in particular (Panwar 2020: 42; Anand 2021: 204)

Shaped by these ideas regarding the need for active engagement of students with the society; starting from the pre-independence Zakir Hussain Commission to the post-independence Radhakrishnan Commission, Indian educationists have continued to emphasize the need for students to be aware of social issues (Singh and Tandon 2015: 114). In consonance with these ideas, the framing of the National Education Policy of 1968, which was later revised in 1986, reflected the need for enhancing the relevance of higher education, by enabling the latter to serve the social needs and aspirations of the people (Singh and Tandon 2015: 115). However, while the university-society connect is recognized by policy makers and educationists as an essential feature of the educational process; the conspicuous absence of a concerted strategy on 'how to connect', has resulted in fragmented approaches towards the latter (Shankar 2021: 79). Further, while commenting on the rapid and transformational changes being witnessed by the Indian higher education in terms of need, character, pedagogy and delivery of higher education; Patwardhan, Mittal and Batra (2021: 4)

called for its evolution, especially against the backdrop of SDGs and in the context of social, technological, and industrial revolution, for achieving holistic social development.

## 2.8 Community engagement in Indian higher education

This section focuses on exploring the trajectory of the CE movement in the Indian higher education, with respect to its emergence, earlier practices and also contemporary manifestations of the same. In doing so, this section also provides a holistic overview of the different types of literature sources in the Indian context, providing evidence of the diverse CE practices in the Indian higher education sector.

### 2.8.1 Emergence and contemporary positioning of community engagement in the Indian higher education policy landscape

The earliest conceptualization and manifestation of CE in Indian higher education can be attributed to the introduction of the National Service Scheme (NSS) in Indian HEI's, launched in 1969 (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports 2006: 5). The scheme introduced social service for students, which aimed at providing them with a quality educational experience and for reforming the educative practices themselves (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports 2006: 5). Among the multiple objectives of the NSS scheme was the positioning of the students in the community, for them to understand the community problems and involve them in problem-solving, while acquiring critical practical skills and competencies and developing a sense of social and civic responsibility (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports 2006: 11). However, Tandon (2014: 7), commented that while several worthwhile projects were undertaken under the scheme, they remained 'assorted', without any clear links to the role of higher education itself. Therefore, the construction of the scheme was more in the form of 'adding on' CE to teaching and learning, rather than integrating it into the latter (Singh and Tandon 2015: 116).

This aspect was acknowledged by Pillai, Manjunath and Hasan (2006: v), who opined that unlike the countries in the global North, CE is still at best, at a modest scale in the Indian context, and not a part of the formal academic training as compared to its global counterparts. However, this report, which was published by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) (an autonomous institution established by the

University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994, in line with the recommendations of the National Education Policy of 1986) is significant, as it marked one of the earliest discussions of the term CE, in the Indian higher education landscape (Pillai, Manjunath and Hasan 2006: 1). Further, it outlined the need to give a concrete shape to HEI-community partnerships, acknowledging the natural affinity in both their interest in, and their contribution towards modernizing the country's human resources (Pillai, Manjunath and Hasan 2006: vi).

The most formal introduction to the concept of CE in Indian higher education policy can be attributed to the introduction of the 12$^{th}$ five-year plan (2012-2017) (Planning Commission 2013: 111). The plan proposed that, given the growing isolation of HEI's from society, there is a need for a renewed effort by HEI's to attend to their social responsibilities and engage with the community as part of their core academic missions (Planning Commission 2013: 111). For the implementation of the 12$^{th}$ plan directives, the planning commission set up a sub-committee (in September 2011) for strengthening CE in India. It acknowledged the social isolation of Indian HEI's and therefore, called for re-establishing and strengthening the linkages between Indian higher education and society (Planning Commission 2011: 3). This report also categorically stated that this needed to be done through a well-coordinated approach, which went beyond the NSS outreach model (Planning Commission 2011: 12). While arguing that HEI's should be encouraged to engage more intensively than before with the wider society, for contributing to the local and regional development agendas; the report of the sub-committee also provided crisp recommendations for operationalizing CE in Indian higher education (Planning Commission 2011: 1). These recommendations included: (i) making CE an intrinsic part of teaching and learning processes at HEI's; (ii) creating an Alliance for Community Engagement (ACE) (membership based network for promoting CE ideas and practices); (iii) establishing an autonomous empowered committee on CE as a funding and policy mechanism; (iv) promoting curricula flexibility for meaningful engagement of CE in HEI's; and, (v) assigning credits for CE activities in evaluation processes (Planning Commission 2011: 1).

Covering the gap highlighted by Pillai, Manjunath and Hasan (2006), the sub-committee report also stated that, 'for education to be a vehicle for social

transformation and to serve the public good, HEI's needed to situate their learning and teaching in the communities in which they are located' (Planning Commission 2011: 3). In doing so, it recommended that CE be an intrinsic part of teaching and learning process', rather than an 'addition' to it (Planning Commission 2011: 3). This signalled a major transition towards positioning CE in the broader Indian higher policy landscape (Singh and Tandon 2015: 115). Further, under the 12th plan guidelines, the UGC also launched a scheme for the establishment of Centre(s) for Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement (CFSRCE) in universities, which acknowledged CE to be a core value for universities and also a mutually educative practice (UGC 2014: 2). The main objectives of the scheme included promoting community-university partnerships for developing contextually useful knowledge, encouraging participatory research, and the integration of service learning and experiential learning in curricular programs (UGC 2014: 2). Complementing this scheme, was the launch of the Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan (UBA) by the Ministry of Education (formerly known as the Ministry of Human Resource Development) on November 11, 2014, built on the Gandhian principles of education, which exhorted HEI's to work towards the development of rural India (Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan 2014: para. 3 line 9; Press Information Bureau 2016: para. 1 line 2).

However, while the above could not sustain the momentum created in favour of CE in Indian higher education or achieve the desired outcome (Panwar 2020: 42), the year 2018, ushered in a new era, with respect to social engagements by Indian HEI's. This birthed two significant developments. The *first* was the launch of the UGC quality mandate in 2018, which focused on improving the societal linkages of HEI's, while enabling students to become socially productive (UGC 2021: v). The *second* major development was the revamping of the UBA scheme, which was reintroduced as UBA 2.0 in April 2018, and which came with a fresh focus, aimed at leveraging the knowledge base and resources of HEI's for bringing in transformational change in rural development processes (Press Information Bureau 2018: para. 1 line 1). This scheme, while providing knowledge and technology support to improve rural livelihoods, also aimed at reorienting and reconnecting the students and faculty to rural realities, in ways such that their learning and research work becomes more engaged and relevant (MHRD 2018: 2).

Under this scheme, the UGC was nominated as a subject expert group on the topic of 'curricular reforms and educational institutions social responsibility', and as a part of which, it launched the national curriculum framework and guidelines on 'fostering social responsibility and community engagement in higher education' in January 2020 (UGC 2020: 3). This framework provided detailed operational guidelines for fostering social responsibility and CE at Indian HEI's (UGC 2020: 9). These included: (i) recommending a curriculum for a new compulsory two credit course on CE in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, (ii) modifying the existing courses and curriculum to align with the CE framework, (iii) offering new audit courses for promoting CE and social responsibility, and (iv) undertaking research in partnership with the community (UGC 2020: 10).

Further, another significant policy directive in this context emerged in the form of the NEP 2020, launched by the Ministry of Education in 2020 (Press Information Bureau 2020: para. 1 line 1). While acknowledging the crucial role played by higher education in promoting human and societal well-being; the policy particularly emphasized the need for constructive public engagement between higher education and society, for making a productive contribution to the latter (MHRD 2020: 33). It also recommended the introduction of flexible and innovative curricula at all HEI's, which include credit-based courses and projects in the areas of CE and service and the development of active research communities engaged in cross-disciplinary research (MHRD 2020: 34). To support the vision outlined by NEP 2020 and to provide operational support to its 2020 guidelines; the UGC in January 2022, launched a master trainer's program, for training faculty members from different Indian HEI's on the concept and practice of CBPR (Press Information Bureau 2022: para. 1 line 1).

These recent developments in the context of CE in Indian higher education policy, marked an era of transition and transformative change, while creating an enabling environment towards the positioning of CE as an institutional priority, in the academic framework of Indian HEI's.

### 2.8.2 Conceptualization and manifestation of community engagement in Indian higher education institutions

The aforementioned narrative documenting the trajectory of positioning CE in Indian higher education reflects a remarkable journey of CE, being viewed as an 'add-on', to making concerted efforts aimed at giving it a more central function in the academia, especially towards the end of the second decade of the 21st century. However, this development and journey remains uncaptured, within the global CE literature, which is conspicuous, through the absence of the Indian experience on this account, especially in the last decade. Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans (2021: 14) highlighted this as one of the gaps in the CE literature, which is dominated primarily by the experiences emerging in the US or the UK context. They noted that the lack of geographical diversity in the literature on CE, is particularly interesting as the notion of local is a fundamental element of the same (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 15). This concern was earlier raised by Escrigas *et al.* (2014: xxxv), who shared that the literature was biased in favour of North American and European scholars (with negligible reference available from the Indian context). This argument was also supported by Bivens, Haffenden and Hall (2015: 8) who noted that much of the body of knowledge on CE has been limited to the authors representing USA, Canada, Europe, United Kingdom, Italy, etc.

However, the last few years has seen a reversal of this trend, as Indian scholarly work in this field has gradually begun to make an appearance in the global CE literature, although its pace has been much slow, when compared globally. However, an analysis of this body of knowledge in the Indian context (between the years 2012-2023, which witnessed the emergence and rise of CE in Indian higher education), reflected three major emerging categories, based on the order in which they appeared. They are: (i) reflection-based literature, (ii) research based institutional studies, and (iv) documentation of institutional engaged scholarship experiences (which is of a more recent occurrence). These three categories of literature (elaborated in the forthcoming sub-sections) have attempted not only to conceptualize CE from the Indian standpoint, but have also highlighted its value in the Indian context, while providing evidence-based information on the existing CE practices and recommendations for its implementation and operationalization.

#### 2.8.2.1 Reflection-based literature

The reflection-based literary pieces in the context of Indian CE, broadly served three purposes: (i) sharing/collation of ideas/perspectives on CE in Indian HEI's (including philosophy, rationale, benefits, outcomes, etc.), (ii) sharing of institutional best practices, and (iii) the application of CE for achieving sustainable societal development. The forthcoming paragraphs captures some of these key pieces and highlights the important messages emerging from them.

Following closely from the first mention of CE in the Indian context by Pillai, Manjunath and Hasan (2006: v), emerged one of the first reflection-based literary pieces on CE in the Indian context by Tandon (2008: 2). While this piece precedes the timeframe of this documentation, it is significant in that it is one of first ones to emphasize the importance of 'civil engagement' in higher education and its role in social and human development, with special reference to the Indian context (Tandon 2008: 2). Here, the author documented the initiatives of academic engagement led by the Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) (an NGO), which included its joint collaborative interventions with HEI's for strengthening research and teaching on the topics of participation, democratic governance and citizenship (Tandon 2008: 12). Building on this, the author argued that professional education of many practitioner-oriented disciplines (like social work), can be made more relevant and practical through creative partnership with NGOs, for creating socially useful and practical knowledge, resulting in mutual benefits (Tandon 2008: 14).

Further, post the launch of the 12$^{th}$ five-year plan, and through another reflection paper; Tandon (2014: 7), while referring to the policy developments in the years 2011-13, and building on his earlier arguments, further explained the idea of CE in India. This can be said to be a seminal piece, impacting the work on CE in the Indian context (Tandon 2014: 4). Here, he made a case for CE, while positioning it not only as means for addressing social challenges, but also as a tool for improving and enhancing teaching, learning and research outcomes (Tandon 2014: 7). In addition to documenting various institutional experiences in CE, he also outlined its six forms: (i) linking learning with community service (referring to the practice of service-learning); (ii) linking research with community knowledge (referring to practices of community-based participatory research/community-based research); (iii) knowledge sharing with

the community (making available the knowledge of academics and students for realizing the developmental aspirations of the communities); (iv) devising new curriculum and courses (co-developing contextually relevant curricula in consultation with local institutions (governmental/non-governmental); (v) including practitioners as teachers (inviting experienced practitioners to co-teach courses at HEI's) and (vi) social innovation by students (student-initiated learning projects, linked to the curriculum). (Tandon 2014: 9).

He also outlined five principles of CE: (i) mutual benefit for communities and institutions, (ii) encompassing the three HEI functions of teaching, research and service, (iii) cross-disciplinary engagement, (iv) credit awards for students and (v) inclusion in performance assessment of faculty engaging in CE work (Tandon 2014: 8). This piece formed the basis of another similar work published by the PRIA (2014: 3) (credited with spearheading CE efforts in India in the CSO domain), which collated its academic engagements with different HEI's across India. This cohered with the six forms of CE, proposed by Tandon (2014: 9). Further, Sabharwal and Malish (2016: 21) highlighted the value of CE in encouraging collective action for public good. They opined that pedagogical methods of service learning and CE can help promote democratic and civic ethos on campuses and includes faculty-community partnerships for research and leadership development in the economic and social spheres (Sabharwal and Malish 2016: 21). Further, Mohan and Bhushan (2017) argued in favour of CE for building a holistic value-based quality education model. The relevance and necessity of CE in shaping value-based education in HEI's is paramount, and this can be achieved through community-university research partnerships, which can help in attaining sustainable national development (Mohan and Bhushan 2017: 322).

Another section of reflection papers explored the institutional best practices/case studies and associated pedagogies of CE in the Indian context. The experience of Loyola College, Chennai in facilitating service-learning practices was explored by Jaiprakash, Kaviarasu and Dinesh (2019: 74). Here, the authors also discussed aspects of CE institutionalization, by way of embedding engaged practices as part of institutional co-curricular programs, while focusing on achieving development, social change and community impact (Jaiprakash, Kaviarasu and Dinesh 2019: 74). Commenting on the institution's engaged research initiatives, they argued that it not

only befitted the research mission of the institution, but also responded to the needs of the community (Jaiprakash, Kaviarasu and Dinesh 2019: 74). Further, community mental health program, widow empowerment program, and promotion of slum women entrepreneurs emerged as some of the good examples of the Loyola model of service learning (Jaiprakash, Kaviarasu and Dinesh 2019: 74).

The case of Indian national law universities and their efforts to attain the United Nations SDGs was explored by Kumari and Sharma (2021: 155) who documented the various initiatives taken by the universities in this direction, for fulfilling their social responsibility mission. This included collaborative research initiatives, knowledge dissemination exercises, establishment of incubation facilities, and launch of new and contextually relevant courses (Kumari and Sharma 2021: 155). Further, Anand (2021: 203), while documenting the experience of Viswa-Bharati University, opined that working together with the community is the key principle for progressive and sustainable social development. Viswa Bharati's efforts towards fostering social responsibility include key CE initiatives, such as knowledge exchange between the university and the community for awareness generation and skill development and student engagement with local community, on the lines of experiential learning (Anand 2021: 206). These initiatives are integrated into the academic curriculum (such as the Rural Awareness Work Experience Program (RAWE)), which includes an exclusive practicum on CE and social responsibility as part of the Masters of Education program (Anand 2021: 206).

Further, Mohan and Bhushan (2017: 326) documented the experience of Dayalbagh Educational Institute (DEI), in implementing CE through research programs, outreach initiatives, organization of vocational training, non-formal schools, etc., thereby bringing together education and work, theory and practice, and university and society. Building on this momentum further, other reflection-based literary works explored the application of CE in the Indian context in achieving societal objectives. Introducing trans-disciplinary CE courses and undertaking research and service through active engagement with the community, were cited as effective means for knowledge dissemination for initiating actions to achieve local targets under UN SDGs (Tandon 2017: 6; Tandon and Pandey 2019: 49). Singh and Tandon (2017: 7) added that CE could serve as a potential tool for ensuring the creation of sustainable and self-reliant

rural societies, by way of contributing towards rural infrastructure, economy, livelihoods, entrepreneurship, innovation and women empowerment.

Therefore, India finds itself amidst an exclusive opportunity in these challenging times to leverage the vast knowledge and massive resources at HEI's (human, physical and financial) to practice effective CE, for achieving transformative social development outcomes (Tandon 2017: 5). Patwardhan and Mittal (2020: 17) further emphasized this aspect as they re-affirmed that university education will play a key role in nurturing future responsible global citizens, by addressing the challenges and changing needs of humanity and civil society. They reiterated that education will be key to driving this social transformation and that universities will have to own this responsibility (Patwardhan and Mittal 2020: 19). However, this will require HEI's to locate their learning and teaching in the communities in which they are located, in a way that connects CE to core academic functions, and also to ensure that it was not limited to a mere 'additive component' (Patwardhan, Mittal and Batra 2021: 5). Therefore, while promoting deeper interactions between the university and the community, CE can also help bridge the gap between theory and practice, making universities more relevant and informed (Patwardhan, Mittal and Batra 2021: 6). This can be achieved through the introduction of engaged courses, curriculum, pedagogies, collaborative research projects etc. (Patwardhan, Mittal and Batra 2021: 6).

#### 2.8.2.2 Research-based institutional studies

Literature within this category, broadly covered two aspects: (i) implementation of CE in the Indian HEI's (including its varied adaptations), and (ii) critical assessment of CE from a stakeholder's perspective. Both the categories focused primarily on capturing the lessons learned, including the benefits, challenges and recommendations for future action.

With respect to the implementation of CE, what is worthy of mention was a pioneering study, conducted by the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research in Social Responsibility in Higher Education in the year 2014-15, which played an important role in initiating debates and discussion on the topic of CE in higher education in India (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 7). This study involved conducting empirical research at four Indian HEI's (Punjab University, Chandigarh; North Bengal University,

Siliguri; Jain University, Bangalore and Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati), for exploring their varied CE practices (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 7). Some of the major gaps it identified with respect to the implementation of CE in the Indian context were: (i) the absence of clarity on the term 'community' or 'CE'; (ii) the perception of CE as an 'extra-curricular activity'; (iii) institutional impediments and lack of institutional mechanism for the facilitation of CE; and, (iv) the lack of synergy between HEI's and civil society (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 13-14).

The study, therefore, proposed recommendations for strengthening CE in the Indian context, which included provisioning clarity in the modus operandi of the CE process, designing of facilitative curricula, increased networking with external partners, and the award of CE scholarships, among others (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 17-18). Another parallel study by Shukla (2014: 9), analyzed CE in the Indian context, and highlighted similar gaps in its implementation such as: (i) a disengaged model of teaching, learning and research, (ii) unstructured and inconsistent CE strategies, and (iii) the absence of motivation amongst faculty and staff. This study further proposed a suggestive framework for CE, such as improved university-society connect, inclusion of CE in professional academic evaluations and award of credits, and designing an improved, engaged curriculum, inclusive of action research projects (Shukla 2014: 11).

Viewing the value of CE, Panwar *et al.* (2014: 985) explored the beneficial impacts arising from the reframing of the foundation year practicum of the social work program at BPS University, through community based and engaged action learning in the villages, alongside the university. Building on the positives emerging out of the initiative, the study recommended action learning to be taken up as part of engaged pedagogies in social work programs in India (Panwar *et al.* 2014: 994). Bhagwan (2017a: 320) also explored the CE practices at the social work department at the same university, with respect to the implementation and associated challenges and pointed towards a set of factors which enabled the CE process. Some of the themes emerging from her study were: (i) the important role of institutional mission, values and leadership support for enabling CE, (ii) a deep and nuanced understanding of the local context for enabling the CE agenda; and (iii) the importance of establishing cordial and mutually respectful relationships with the community (Bhagwan 2017a: 321).

Exploring CE practices in the department of social work, at the University of Rajasthan; another study of a similar nature emphasized the importance of community-based learning, strongly grounded in community partnerships, which in turn enhanced the quality and relevance of teaching as well (Jadhav and Suhalka 2016: 24). This study also highlighted the aspect of mutual benefits, as a characterizing feature of CE initiatives, as it documented the beneficial impacts of the latter on students (enhanced knowledge, awareness and skills) and the community as well (increased resources, capacities and confidence to address challenges and devise local solutions) (Jadhav and Suhalka 2016: 26). Panwar (2020: 44) reiterated the myriad benefits extended by CE, to universities and academic stakeholders, including an opportunity for the students to apply theoretical knowledge for public good. However, the author also outlined the underlying challenges in the process that demanded attention, which were: (i) devaluation of local/indigenous knowledge by academics, (ii) difficulty in measuring the impact of CE activities on the community, (iii) the lack of institutional support and, (iv) absence of a clear and common understanding of the concept of CE (Panwar 2020: 45). To address these challenges, the author recommended redesigning course curriculum and pedagogies, to align them with the CE agenda; building capacities of students, faculty; provisioning financial resources; and fostering open and mutually respectful partnership with the communities (Panwar 2020: 47).

Further, while exploring the unique perspective of tribal worldviews, within the broader framework of a CE program at another Indian HEI; Rowkith and Bhagwan (2020: 5) proposed key implications within a CE perspective. These included: (i) the importance of CE in nurturing and understanding tribal cultural identities, (ii) emergence of joint community development programs, as a result of engagement between the university and the tribal community, and (iii) development of skills and competencies in students (such as community organizing), while exposing them to the real-world realities of inequality, social justice and exclusion (Rowkith and Bhagwan 2020: 7). This study also found that CE strengthened the notion that diversity can be emancipating, and therefore, argued in favour of creation of reciprocal associations between universities and communities, where the latter may emerge as effective learning platforms, owing to their vast and rich indigenous knowledge (Rowkith and Bhagwan 2020: 11). Further, providing an alternate perspective on this, Bhagwan (2022: 1) argued that CE or field engagements with tribal communities, in turn strengthened the social work learning

experiences of the students. In doing so, it also connected students from urban spaces to community spaces, which enhanced their learning's (disciplinary and beyond) about the disadvantaged tribal community in a multifaceted way (Bhagwan 2022: 13).

The work of Joseph and Jacob (2021: 115) emerged as another important literary piece, which highlighted the role of UGC guidelines in promoting CE at Indian HEI's, in the form of service-learning and experiential learning. By documenting case studies of CE at arts and science colleges in Kerala, the authors endorsed the idea of using CE to utilize the untapped energy of Indian youth for nation building (Joseph and Jacob 2021: 115). Further, a unique development outcome of social capital creation in Indian HEI's was explored from the lens of CE, through a study conducted by Singh, Bhatt and Singh (2021: 1). This study found that practices which meaningfully engage the academia and the community in the form of CE, create mutually beneficial partnerships between the stakeholders, thereby paving way for the establishment of strong social networks, relationships and social capital in the bargain (Singh, Bhatt and Singh 2021: 50). The study also asserted that strong university-community partnerships are the key to successful mainfestation of CE; social capital creation; and in achieveing the SDGs and holistic community development (Singh, Bhatt and Singh 2021: 50). Exploring the role of university-community partnerships further, Singh (2021: 123), studied the application of CBPR in the Indian context, manifested through a partnership between PRIA and Christ University. The study findings, corroborated the argument that not only do such partnerships provide an opportunity to do 'responsible research' to further critical societal outcomes; but also also instills in students, deep sensibilities, responsbilities and consciousness towards societal realities (Singh 2021: 132).

With respect to literature on the impact and perception of stakeholders in the CE process, three studies emerged as being most relevant. *Firstly*, Kavatekar and Vijaya (2017a: 13), through a primary research study conducted at Jain University, explored the experiences of student engagement in village-based projects, and made the case for CE as an important tool for ensuring inclusive growth. However, the study also outlined some pertinent challenges, faced by students (coordination of projects, logistics, developing rapport with communities) and faculty (workload management, amidst a regular teaching schedule) in the process (Kavatekar and Vijaya 2017a: 18).

It, therefore, called for a more structured approach to CE, including full institutional support (Kavatekar and Vijaya 2017a: 19). *Secondly*, Singh (2017: 7) provided another perspective on CE, as the author attempted to gauge the impact of CE on different stakeholders (students, faculty, researchers, community, government, CSOs and university as an institution) involved in a CE process, through an empirical research study. Making the case for CE and the importance of its impact evaluation, the study concluded that CE has emerged as one of the priority areas of Indian higher education and is of tremendous importance to the society which is at crossroads and amidst turmoil; while having mutual benefits for all involved in the process (Singh 2017: 13). *Thirdly*, another stakeholder perception analysis study on the process of CE was conducted by Bhatnagar *et al.* (2020: 9) for understanding how they perceived, conceptualized and approached the process. While the faculty acknowledged the gaps (physical, knowledge, culture, value, etc.) between HEI's and communities; the students questioned the market-driven nature of educative practices, and therefore called for more socially engaged teaching-learning practices (Bhatnagar *et al.* 2020: 11).

#### 2.8.2.3 Documentation of institutional engaged scholarship experiences

The renewed policy push for CE by the Indian higher education policy regulators in the last few years has translated into an evident momentum shift in favor of CE in Indian higher education (MHRD 2020: 34; UGC 2020: 7). This has been further aided by strategic initiatives and programs, such as the UGC coordinated faculty training program in CBPR and the advocacy of the same, led by the Knowledge for Change (K4C) program of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education (Lepore, Hall and Tandon 2021: 349; Press Information Bureau 2022: para. 1 line 2). The cumulative impacts of these efforts and developments have contributed towards strengthening and consolidating the practice of CE in Indian higher education (Joseph and Jacob 2021: 115). This has translated into the emergence of scholarly literature, documenting concrete examples and experiences of engaged scholarship being practiced by Indian HEI's (Bhatt *et al.* 2023: 164; Lepore, Hall and Tandon 2023: 6). These experiences signal a marked difference from the earlier general conceptualization of CE as discussed in the preceding section, to its more recent and contemporary manifestations within the core academic

scholarship of teaching, research and service. This, therefore, provides evidence of the latter becoming more engaged, contextually relevant and socially useful. The following paragraphs captures some of the significant emergent Indian literature in this context.

With respect to engaged teaching and learning, Jose and Sahu (2023: 224), while drawing on their experiences at Christ university, illustrated how service-learning has been used as an experiential instrument for effecting meaningful CE. Such practices implemented across different academic disciplines has enriched student learning, helped faculty better translate theory into practice, while also leading to positive transformations in the community ecosystem (Jose and Sahu 2023: 238). Similar experiences in the case of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham were narrated by Valsan, Viswanath and Lieres (2023: 197), where service-learning projects integrated community service with academic content. They added that inclusion of such projects in teaching-learning practices established reciprocal relations between the university and community and fostered civic responsibility amongst students, thereby emerging as an effective form of CE (Valsan, Viswanath and Lieres 2023: 206). Further, Singhal and Vijayaraghavan (2023: 169) elucidated how service-learning pedagogy was introduced into the core curricular framework at the Goa Institute of Management. This was done by way of devising a four-credit course called ‘social responsibility and action’, where student’s classroom learning was complemented by learnings derived by engaging with under-privileged communities (Singhal and Vijayaraghavan 2023: 169).

With respect to engaged research, Venugopal *et al.* (2023: 100) documented the experiences of undertaking a CBPR project in partnership with local, tribal communities for improving maternal health outcomes for tribal women. By weaving in academic knowledge and community wisdom, the project co-created new knowledge, which not only strengthened the academic understanding of tribal mental health, but also helped validate and legitimize community knowledge (Venugopal *et al.* 2023: 112). Further, this also allowed for identifying gaps in that knowledge, which when bridged could further improve maternal health care of rural women (Venugopal *et al.* 2023: 103). In another evidence of engaged research practices, Yadav *et al.* (2023: 117), highlighted the research partnerships between Manipal University, Jaipur and

the local communities on the aspect of waste management, which paved the way for collaborative knowledge creation and sharing. However, the authors also outlined the challenges plaguing such partnerships, which included the latter being skewed in favor of HEI's, and therefore, called for sustainable university-community relationships for effecting meaningful research partnerships between the two (Yadav *et al.* 2023: 130).

With respect to engaged service, Panwar (2023: 213) narrated the experience at BPS Women's university, where CE was applied in the discipline of social work, in a way to effect holistic social development of neighboring rural communities. The author also elucidated the importance of dialogue and participation in carrying out effective engagement with local community stakeholders, for achieving socio-economic development (Panwar 2023: 220). Further, Mundra and Gupta (2023: 260), while sharing the experience at JK Lakshmipat university, described how CE was used to serve the communities, to attain sustainable development outcomes. This included channeling the university's expertise and resources towards addressing social issues, in partnerships with a wide variety of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds (Mundra and Gupta 2023: 267).

## 2.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided a holistic summary of the seminal literature in the field of CE in higher education. In addition to presenting the broad context, which set the tone of the study; the chapter elucidated important literature, in line with the study's research objectives. In doing so, it covered global perspectives in this area of work, along with capturing how it has originated and developed in the Indian context. The chapter also situated the context of the research study amidst the broader scheme of things.

This is now followed by a detailed description of the research methodology adopted to guide the study, which is presented in the next chapter (Chapter 3).

# CHAPTER THREE:
# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

Research is not just a process of gathering information; rather, it is a systematic (planned, organized, with a specific goal) process of making discoveries, which includes answering unanswered questions or creating knowledge, which does not currently exist (Goddard and Melville 2004: 1). Once the 'what' of the study has been established (i.e. the research problem); the next step is to outline the 'how' of the study, specifying the method of achieving the stated research objectives in the best possible manner (Chawla and Sodhi 2011: 48). This is guided by a concept known as the 'research design', guided by research paradigms (Chawla and Sodhi 2011: 48). Thyer (1993, cited in Chawla and Sodhi 2011: 48) referred to a research design as the blueprint or a detailed plan on how a research study is to be completed (including details of sample selection, data collection and data analysis).

This chapter on research methodology presents an exhaustive account of the research design adopted for the study. In doing so, it describes all its essential tenets in the following order. The chapter begins with an introduction (current section 3.1), followed by an overview of the research paradigm adopted for the study (section 3.2) and the researcher's role in the latter and the associated reflexive practices (section 3.3). Thereafter, the setting where the study was implemented is described (section 3.4), followed by an explanation of the study population (section 3.5), samples used in the study (section 3.6), the sampling strategy adopted (section 3.7) and the sampling process followed (section 3.8). The chapter then goes forward to provide an account of the data collection processes and procedures followed in the study (section 3.9). Culminating the process, section 3.10 provides an explanation of the data analysis strategy adopted for reaching the findings. Section 3.11 is dedicated to accounting for how trustworthiness was achieved in the study. Lastly, section 3.12 provides an overview of the ethical considerations and principles followed and operationalized during the implementation of the study. The chapter finally ends with a section on concluding remarks, which recapitulates the main pointers, which subsequently paves the way for the next chapter (Chapter 4).

## 3.2 Research paradigm

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs that guides research action and investigation, and represents a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 107). A paradigm defines a researcher's philosophical orientation, as it provides the beliefs and dictates, which influence the researcher's choice of what should be studied, how it should be studied and how the results of the study need to be investigated (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017: 26). Weaver and Olson (2006: 460), referred to research paradigm, as a pattern of beliefs and practices that regulate enquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which an investigation is accomplished. However, McGregor (2018: 69) posited that paradigms are thought processes that help people make sense of the world, regardless of whether they are engaged in research in not.

Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Khatri 2020: 1436) and Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 26) stated that research paradigm comprises of four elements: *epistemology* (nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and that which would be known), *ontology* (nature of reality), *methodology* (an appropriate approach to systematic enquiry) and *axiology* (nature of ethics). Among the dominant research paradigms proposed by scholars and researchers are, *positivist* (defining a worldview grounded in scientific methods of investigation), *interpretivist or constructivist* (attempting to understand subjective world of human experience), *critical* (situating research in social justice issues) and *pragmatic* (advocating the use of mixed methods to understand human behaviour) (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017: 30).

In this context, the current study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, as it seeks to understand the conceptualization and institutionalization of CE in Indian HEI's from the perspectives and experiences of academics enrolled in the latter (both the executive leadership and faculty members), with the objective of developing a framework for guiding and strengthening the practice of CE in India. With this background, qualitative research methodology was used to guide and conduct the study at hand, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015: 14; Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 9; Kivunja and Kuyini 2017: 36). Flick (2018b: 36) argued that the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm informs many

qualitative research programmes with the approach that the reality being studied is the social products of the actors, the interactions, and the institutions. Further, this is also consistent with the view proposed by Tilley (2019: 157), who recognized the value of qualitative research in educational contexts as involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world for a deeper exploration of individual experiences of educational systems to produce findings that can inform educational administrators and policymakers.

Therefore, the exploration of perspectives and experiences of academics constitutes the classic focus of qualitative research, where their opinions are explored in their own words, through careful dialogue and discussion (Creswell 2014). These words are then analysed to bring out a new perspective, through a set of themes that transcends the opinions and thoughts of any single individual. Therefore, the epistemological assumption behind the choice of interpretivist paradigm for the study was to gain an understanding of the academic's understanding of conceptualization of CE, its institutionalization and operationalization at the interface of teaching, research and service functions. These experiences could only be captured by hearing about their first-hand experiences and practices, as they are the ones who execute the engaged interventions in class and in the field, and thereby collecting in-depth information on the same.

Further, the ontological assumption of the study is guided by the existence of multiple realities, which in terms of CE, is socially constructed and practiced by different academics at different HEI's (Creswell 2007). Therefore, considering that social realities are co-constructed and cannot be defined unilaterally, it was important to capture the meanings, experiences and perceptions of academics on CE, through semi-structured in-depth interviews, in line with the research objectives and questions. In doing so, evidence of such multiple realities could be obtained by using interview quotes and extracts, while replicating the exact words of academics, which then also reflected their different viewpoints and realities. Therefore, an interpretivist paradigm and the corresponding assumptions have firmly directed this research in following the qualitative research approach.

## 3.3 Qualitative research methodology

Consistent with the preceding discussions, and the focus of the research study on exploring, understanding and describing have well indicated the appropriateness of qualitative research (Babbie and Mouton 2007). Further, Creswell (2014: 32) contextualized qualitative research, which also confirmed the prior considerations taken in the context of the study, as he posited that 'qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or a human problem It involves understanding the meaning that people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 15). They further outline four characteristics as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: (i) the focus is on process, understanding and meaning; (ii) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; (iii) the process is inductive; and (iv) richly descriptive (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 15). Flick (2009: 21) posited that qualitative research is oriented towards analysing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity, starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts. This perspective was supported by Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015: 18), Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 15) and Aspers and Corte (2019: 142) who argued that qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their daily lives or understanding the meaning that people have constructed, and also empathize and identify with them, in order to understand how they make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world.

Therefore, qualitative researchers are interested in people's belief and experiences from their own perspectives (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015: 14; Flick 2018b: 8; Silverman 2020: 3). The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret issues and phenomena systematically from the point of view of the individual or the population being studied, and to generate new concepts and theories (Mohajan 2018: 2). It is against this background that I chose a qualitative research approach for the study, aimed at exploring the experiences of academics with respect to the conceptualization, institutionalization and operationalization of CE in Indian HEI's, in

order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the latter, and to develop concepts based on themes emerging from the data collection process.

Flick (2018c: x) also highlighted that qualitative research is no longer 'just not quantitative research', as it has developed an identity (or multiple identities) for itself. Qualitative research approaches the world 'out there' (not in specialized research settings as in laboratories, but in the local contexts) to understand, describe, and sometimes, to explain 'social phenomenon from the inside', in several different ways (Flick 2018c: x). To achieve this objective, qualitative researchers seek to capture how the people construct the world around them, by analysing their experiences through interactions, communications, biographies, document analysis etc. (Flick 2018c: x). In a similar vein, Leavy (2014: 1), stated that qualitative research is an engaged way of building knowledge about the social world and human experience, and one wherein, researchers are not outside of their projects, but located and shifting within them. Therefore, interviews and focus groups are among the most commonly used research tools under the banner of qualitative research (Donalek 2005; Anderson 2010: 1; Magnusson and Marecek 2015; Flick 2018c: 124; Silverman 2020).

In the context of this study, which particularly focuses on CE, and which is often viewed in conjunction with aspects like participation and collaboration; it is important to clarify that the reasons behind the choice of an objective qualitative research methodology to conduct the study. While focusing on CE, the study in particular, seeks to carve out how its practices are understood by academics at HEI's, how it is institutionalized within an institution and in the different ways in which it is operationalized. Exploration of these aspects would not have been possible, by using a participatory research design, which is mostly used in cases of community-based or community-based participatory research approaches, conducted in collaboration between HEI's and communities (Hall et al. 2017: 9). Further, only in such collaborative research approaches conducted on the field, can the principles of participatory research be applied, which are: participation, cooperation, co-learning, capacity building, empowerment and balance between research and action (Minkler and Wallerstein 2008, cited in Hall and Tandon 2017: 8). As such, this approach would not have cohered with the objectives of the study. Hence, a qualitative research approach, as

argued for above, was a more appropriate methodology, in the context of the study at hand.

Building on these arguments, I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews, as the data collection tool. This approach was considered best to explore the experiences of academics at Indian HEI's, in their natural setting, on CE and its positioning with respect to its conceptualization, institutionalization and operationalization (Magnusson and Marecek 2015: 58; Flick 2018b: 61). The framework of qualitative research allowed me to explore the experiences and perceptions of academics in detail, through interview questions that were presented to the study participants. Further, this enabled me to collect in-depth and rich information pertaining to the study objectives (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015: 101; Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 108; Mohajan 2018: 29). The data was collected from two samples of academics, namely: academics belonging to the executive leadership of HEI's (sample 1) and faculty members from various departments and schools (sample 2) of the same HEI's.

## 3.4 Researcher's role and reflexivity

Reflexivity is a central tenet of qualitative work (Staller 2021: 230). Gilgun (2008: 184) defined reflexivity as the 'awareness of the multiple influences that researchers have on research processes, and how such influences affect them and the persons and situations they research'. The term 'reflexive' is therefore, used to denote actions that direct attention back to the self and fosters a circular relationship between the subject and the object (Probst 2015: 37). Therefore, reflexive engagement, while planning, conducting and writing about research, promotes an ongoing reflexive relationship between the researcher's subjective responses and the intersubjective dynamics of the research process itself (Probst 2015: 37). As an introspective process, wherein the researcher reflects on their actions and assumptions, reflexivity can be regarded as an introspective process, which helps the researcher become aware of and transparent, with respect to their subjective influence on the research process (Darawsheh 2014: 562). Therefore, reflexivity can raise the rigor and quality of qualitative research, by employing the researcher's subjectivity (Darawsheh 2014: 568).

However, Probst and Berenson (2014: 813) highlighted that the mechanism of reflexivity may not lie in the specific activity, but the attitude with which it is carried out. Similarly, Leavy (2017: 48) viewed reflexivity in the context of discovery, by accounting for the researcher's role and position in the research process, and emphasizing on 'how the discovery is made', along with 'what discovery is made'. Having had prior work experience in the field of study, I had the opportunity to explore and be involved in aspects at the interface of the study topic, through various capacities. This contributed to my understanding of community engagement in the Indian context. However, the researcher was consciously aware of her positioning in the study, in this regard, and ensured that any of her prior understanding did not reflect in any form, during the course of the study, and in the process of data collection in particular. I remained aware to avoid projecting my own experience while engaging with the study participants, or using the former as a lens to view and understand participant experiences (Berger 2013: 230).

Further, to prevent any biases, I constantly reminded herself of how, any of her prior understanding or beliefs about the study area, could have a potential negative impact on the process of gathering data and in its interpretation (Holmes 2020: 4). However, instead of attempting to eliminate her impact on the research process, I tried to minimize or control this effect, or at least understand them (when interpreting data) by means of reflective journal keeping, research diaries, field notes etc. (Long and Johnson 2000: 33; Flick 2009: 296; Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015: 19). Doing so, I maintained extensive field notes/memo notes throughout the process of data collection and analysis for documenting and accounting her position in the process (Leavy 2017: 50). Accordingly, my actions and observations in the field, impressions, emotions and feelings and so on, become data in their own right (and therefore, a part in the process of knowledge production). This also formed a part of interpretation, and has been documented in my research notes/diaries (Flick 2009: 16; Flick 2018b: 7). Further, these notes were continuously reviewed and updated to account for, and to recognize and reduce personal biases in the process. Such notes were stored in a steel safe for ensuring privacy and confidentiality. This safe was locked and was accessible only to me, as per ethics protocols.

## 3.5 Study setting

Consistent with the outlined objectives of the study, the setting for this study included the gamut of Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEI's). However, it needs to be stated, that the Indian higher education sector is massive in scale, and the Indian HEI's are broadly categorized into three categories: universities, colleges and stand-alone institutions (Ministry of Education 2021: 2). As per the All-India Survey of Higher Education 2020-21, India has 1113 universities, 43796 colleges and 11296 stand-alone institutions (Ministry of Education 2021: xiii). Therefore, in consideration of the extensive scale of the Indian higher education sector, spread over a vast geographical area; this study limited itself to understanding the status of CE in Indian universities/university-level institutions (referred to as HEI's in the context of this study) only, while not foraying into colleges or stand-alone institutions. The UGC recognizes the following categorizations of Indian HEI's (primarily based on the establishing entity and the funding received): central, state, private and deemed-to-be (UGC 2023: 1). A brief description of these categorizations are as follows:

- Central universities: These are the universities which are established by an Act of the Indian parliament and are directly under the purview of the Department of Higher Education, in the Ministry of Education, Government of India (Department of Higher Education 2021: para. 7 line 1).

- State universities: These are the universities which are established by the State legislative assembly Act, and are run by the state governments of the respective states/union territories. They are founded, funded and operated by the state governments (Department of Higher Education 2021: para. 8 line 1).

  **Central and state government universities are also collectively known as public universities, as they receive direct funding from the government (either centre, state, or partially by both).*

- Private universities: These universities are also established by state Acts and are regulated under the UGC (Establishment and Maintenance of Standards in Private Universities) Regulations, 2003, and are mandated to follow the UGC

provisions under the UGC Act, 1956. However, these universities do not run on state or central funds and are funded by private bodies (Department of Higher Education 2021: para. 9 line 1).

- Deemed to be universities: These refer to high performing institutions who have been so declared by the central government under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956. They have been conferred with university status, owing to their long-standing tradition in teaching, research, or specialization in a particular field of knowledge. However, unlike private universities, they enjoy full autonomy over operational matters (Department of Higher Education 2021: para. 10 line 11).

Therefore, in consideration with the diverse nature of Indian HEI's/universities spread across diverse geographical zones, and keeping in mind the exploratory nature of the study, the following criteria was applied for the selection of HEI's for the study:

*(i)* Category: The study selected at least 1 HEI from each of the categories of Indian HEI's, as mentioned earlier. Accordingly, the eight HEI's selected for the study belonged to the following categories: Public (2); Private (3) and Deemed-to-be (3).

*(ii)* Geography: The selected HEI's also represented all the four major geographical zones of India, with each HEI belonging to a different state (in the respective geographical zone). Accordingly, the four geographical zones and the eight states covered were as follows: (a) North India (2; in the states of Haryana (1) and Uttar Pradesh (1)); (b) South India (2; the states of Karnataka (1) and Kerala (1)); (c) East India (1; in the state of Odisha); West India (2; in the states of Gujarat (1) and Rajasthan (1)); and (d) Central India (1; in the state of Chhattisgarh).

*(iii)* History of CE: As this was a qualitative, exploratory study attempting to understand CE in best practice Indian HEI's, the selection of HEI's was also based on their history, understanding and experience in the field of CE.

However, pertinent to the study at hand, Creswell (2007: 119) questioned whether researchers in qualitative research can study site or individuals in which they may have a personal or a professional interest. He further posited that such a scenario may create power imbalances between the researcher and the study participants, who may feel coerced by the position of the researcher. To neutralize this possibility, multiple sources of information were used for the purpose of the study, which was then also subjected to multiple strategies for validation.

## 3.6 Study population

A population represents all the people, objects or events, with certain characteristics that a researcher would like to study, or seek and establish new knowledge or information on (Boslaugh 2008: 10; Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard 2014: 57; Chadwick 2017: para. 1 line 1). van Rijnsoever (2017: 3) defined a population as the total set of information sources that are potentially relevant to answering the research question. Similarly, Given (2008: 644) posited that a population is a concept in research methods that refers to every individual who fits the criteria (broad or narrow), that the researcher has laid out for the selection of research participants. In qualitative research, these criteria are clearly defined by the researcher, prior to the initiation of the research and collection of data (Flick 2018b: 174). In this study, these criteria laid out by the researcher, are elaborated in sub-section 3.8.2. The study comprised two sets of populations: academics belonging to the executive leadership at the selected HEI's; and academics who performed their duties as faculty members in different departments/schools/disciplines, in the same. From these two sets of populations, two samples were selected, corresponding to the respective categories. The next section provides the details for the samples selected for the study.

## 3.7 Study sample

Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 95) argued that within every study, there are numerous sites that can be visited, events or activities that could be observed, people who can be interviewed (belonging to the whole population set) and documents that can be read. It therefore becomes necessary for the researcher to choose or select what, when, where and whom to interview or observe (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 95). This selection of a unit of analysis in a research study, is known as a sample (Merriam and

Tisdell 2016: 95). Therefore, the general issue in sampling is the selection of units from a wider population (which might be too big to be studied completely), so that the research in the end can make statements, which applies not only to just the individual participants in the study, but to the population as well (Flick 2018b: 173). However, Maxwell (2013, cited in Guetterman 2015: 4) explained that in qualitative research, a researcher's intent is not to generalize from the sample to the population, but to explain, describe and interpret the phenomenon being studied. Consequently, sampling is not a matter of representative opinions, but of information richness. Given (2008: 797), referred to a sample as the set of actual data sources that are drawn from a larger population of potential data sources. Therefore, a sample is a set *n* (sample size) sampling units selected from among *N* units which make up the population and represent the population for the purpose of the study (Corbetta 2003: 212).

Consistent with the above, and for the study at hand, small sample sizes were selected (from the population) with the objective of obtaining data, which could provide in-depth information, in line with the study's objectives. Accordingly, two sets of samples were selected from the two sets of population, as outlined in the preceding section, and therefore included academics belonging to the executive leadership at the HEI's (sample 1) and faculty members in different departments/schools/disciplines, in the respective HEI's (sample 2). Further details on the two sets of samples will be discussed later in the chapter. The next section discusses the sampling strategy adopted for the study.

## 3.8 Sampling strategy

Sampling is a set of procedures, or the process used for selecting the study elements or the sample (Gliner, Morgan and Leech 2017: 143). A sampling strategy describes how the researcher selects the information sources (van Rijnsoever 2017: 6). The two basic types of sampling are probability and non-probability sampling (Given 2008: 799; Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 96). Probability sampling is a sampling procedure which gives every element in the target population a known and non-zero probability of being selected (Daniel 2015: 513). On the other hand, non-probability sampling does not give every element in the target population a known or non-zero probability of being selected, as some members of the target population would have a probability of being selected, and others would not have a chance to be selected (Daniel 2015: 513).

Therefore, non-probability samples are not random and are the ones in which the probability of being selected is unknown, since there is no sampling frame or list of the members of the accessible population (Gliner, Morgan and Leech 2017: 147). Therefore, in qualitative research, a sampling design is not random, but defined purposively to include the most appropriate participants in the most appropriate context, for answering the research question (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin 2020: 141).

Further, Guest (2015, cited in Daniel 2015: 520), Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 96) and Berndt (2020: 224) opined that non-probabilistic sampling is the norm or the method of choice in qualitative research or when using qualitative data collection methods, as qualitative enquiry is not intended for statistical generalizability. As sampling in qualitative research is designed to facilitate the collection of 'rich' information that enhances the understanding of the problem under study; non-probability sampling stands as an appropriate choice for qualitative research methods (Daniel 2012: 77). Gliner, Morgan and Leech (2017: 143) stated that most studies in social sciences or education, use non-probability sampling techniques, as they are useful in discovering new information and exploring relationships among variables.

Therefore, this study adopts the strategy of non-probability sampling as I recognize that certain participants (academics in this case) are likely to be rich with data or insights, and therefore, more relevant and useful in achieving the research objectives (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin 2020: 149), relating to the topic under study. Situating this choice of sampling strategy within the research methodology literature, we find Creswell (2007: 125) endorsing the choice of purposive sampling in situation where 'individuals and sites are chosen for a study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon under study. Therefore, as affirmed from literature sources cited above, this strategy was selected as I did not intend to include all members of the population with equal probability, but only those participants who could give rich information, and from whom high quality data could be obtained in the context of the study (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin 2020: 141).

There are four major types of non-probability sample designs: availability, purposive, quota and respondent assisted (Daniel 2012: 82). While addressing the research

questions, which are of a qualitative nature; purposive (or purposeful) sampling is the most commonly used, among the non-probabilistic sampling methods (Given 2008: 697; Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 18; Gliner, Morgan and Leech 2017: 149; van Rijnsoever 2017: 5; Aspers and Corte 2019: 141). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure, in which elements are selected from the target population, based on their fit with the purposes of the study and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Daniel 2012: 87). Similarly, Flick (2018b: 182) argued that such sampling techniques target specific cases/participants, because of what they can contribute to the study. This argument was endorsed by Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin (2020: 141), who referred to purposive sampling as the 'intentional selection of research participants (having particular experience or certain expertise), to optimize data sources for answering the research question.

In a similar vein, Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 96) argued that such sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand and gain insights, and therefore must select a sample from which, much can be learned. As shared by Patton (2015, cited in Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 96) and Gliner, Morgan and Leech (2017: 150), the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling emerges from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of information-rich cases, from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of enquiry. Therefore, I purposively selected the elements that satisfied specific exclusion and inclusion criteria for participation in the study (Daniel 2012: 88; Gliner, Morgan and Leech 2017: 149). These criteria in the context of this study are detailed in sub-section 3.8.2.

Essentially, purposive sampling signifies engaging in a series of strategic choices about with whom, where and how the research is conducted (Given 2008: 697). Therefore, in purposive sampling, the researcher makes an informed and conscious selection of participants who have experienced the central phenomenon, or the key concept being explored in the study (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011: 173). Flick (2018b: 185) also opined that in interview based qualitative studies, purposive sampling is connected to the decision about which individuals/persons to interview. Given that in-depth data was sought on the aspect of conceptualization and institutionalization of CE in Indian HEI's; I adopted a purposive sampling technique in

the study, for selection of participants, who could provide rich and quality perspectives on the topic of the study (Given 2008: 697; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011: 294). The next section provides a detailed account of the sampling process followed in the study.

## 3.9 Sampling process

Sampling is defined as the selection of a sub-set of a population for inclusion in the study (Daniel 2012: 1). This section touches upon the various aspects of the sampling process in the following order: (i) implementation of the sampling plan, including details of the sample selected and the sample size finalized, in line with the principle of data saturation (sub-section 3.8.1); (ii) inclusion and exclusion criteria defined for the study (sub-section 3.8.2); (iii) the procedure adopted for recruiting the samples (sub-section 3.8.3) and, (iv) an overview of the sampling process (sub-section 3.8.4).

### 3.9.1 Implementation of the sampling plan

Prior to detailing the implementation of the sampling plan for the research study at hand, it would be appropriate to have a quick recap of the research methodology journey traversed by me so far. Building on the literature cited in the chapter, and in line with the arguments made; I undertook a qualitative enquiry to explore and understand how CE is conceptualized and institutionalized at Indian HEI's. Given the nature of the study, and to fulfil the research objectives in relation to the latter, I adopted non-probability sampling technique, and purposive sampling in particular, to select specific academics at HEI's, who could provide rich and in-depth information which could help in fulfilling the study's objective. Considering this, I outlined clear inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria for selection of participants within each sample (detailed in sub-section 3.8.2), to ensure that rich data was secured with respect to the enquiry at hand. Accordingly, two sets of samples were purposively selected from the HEI's covered under the study:

**Sample 1**: This set consisted of academics from the executive management/administration of the HEI's.

**Sample 2**: This set comprised of faculty members from different disciplinary departments/schools.

Academics from the executive management/administration were purposively selected (as sample 1) for providing a holistic view of the overall vision/mission with respect to the conceptualization and institutionalization of CE at their respective HEI's. Further, the selection of faculty members from different departments/faculty/schools (as sample 2) was done with the idea of gaining practical and ground-level insights on the conceptualization, operationalization and institutionalization of CE at HEI's. This was done considering that it was the faculty members who drive CE practices at the departmental/school/faculty level.

The next step was to determine the sample size for the study. The sample size refers to the number of data sources/subjects in a study that are selected from the given population of interest (Given 2008: 798; Salkind 2010: 1299). Patton (2015, cited in Schreier (2018: 89) argued, that in contrast to sample size selection in quantitative research, which is based on statistical generalizability; qualitative research, emphasizes the information-richness relevant to the research objectives. Sample composition is therefore, considered more important than sample size. In most qualitative studies, the goals of the research highlight an in-depth, subjective and highly contextualized understanding of specific phenomenon, and such goals are well suited to small sample sizes (Given 2008: 798; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011: 186).

Consistent with these arguments, I chose small sample sizes (as reflected in the following table) to collect in-depth information for fulfilling the research objectives.

| **Sample number** | **Population** | **Total number of HEI's covered** | **Minimum number of participants recruited per HEI** | **Initially planned number of participant recruitments (from all HEI's)** | **Final number of participants recruited (from all HEI's)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Academics from executive management/administration | 8 | 2 | n=16 | n=21 |
| 2 | Faculty members from different departments/schools | 8 | 3 | n=24 | n=29 |
| Total | | | | n=40 | n=50 |

Table 3.1: Samples and sample sizes included in the study

While it was originally planned to include a total number of forty (40) academics (16 belonging to sample 1; and 24 belonging to sample 2); the final number of participants recruited for the study comprised of fifty (50) academics (with 21 academics belonging to sample 1, while 29 academics belonging to sample 2) across the eight (8) HEI's. This was in line with the principle of data saturation, which is elucidated below.

In qualitative studies, determination of the final sample size is largely based on having sufficient opportunity to collect relevant data until no new information emerges from the data collection process, new coding is not possible, and/or new themes are not emerging (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006: 65; Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin 2020: 141). This is then referred to as reaching data saturation, which is a common standard of rigour for data collection in qualitative studies (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin 2020: 141). Daniel (2012: 247) attributed the concept of data saturation (also known as theoretical saturation or information redundancy), as popularly used in non-probability sampling, where the researcher continues to sample, until additional elements do not provide new information. Similarly, Hennink and Kaiser (2022: 2) outlined that data saturation is the point in data collection, when no additional issues or insights are identified, and the data begins to repeat, so that further data collection is redundant, signifying that an adequate sample size is reached. Therefore, Francis *et al.* (2010, cited in Hennink and Kaiser 2022: 2) posited that saturation is an important indicator that the sample is adequate for the phenomenon studied. Further, it also indicates that the data collected, has captured the diversity, depth and nuances of the issue studied, thereby demonstrating content validity (Fusch and Ness 2015: 1408; Guest, Namey and Chen 2020: 2). Data saturation is therefore, the most utilized concept for estimating sample sizes in qualitative studies (Guest, Namey and Chen 2020: 2).

In line with these theoretical arguments, the principle of data saturation was applied to the study at hand. This meant that although a specific sample size was outlined in the planning/design phases of the study, I applied the principle of data saturation to determine the final sample size selected for the study. Therefore, the sample sizes mentioned in the table (Table 3.1) refers to the final number of participants included in the study, after I ascertained that data saturation had been reached, while collecting data. In this context, an important point was raised by Burmeister and Aitken (2012, cited in Fusch and Ness 2015: 1409), who outlined that data saturation is not about

numbers per se, but about the depth of the data. Therefore, the factor which determines whether data saturation is reached; is not influenced by how large or small the sample is, but what constitutes the sample. This aspect has important implications for the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined for participation in the study. Further details on these criteria are detailed in the next section.

### 3.9.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Sampling criteria identifies the characteristics of the sample population and their eligibility to be a part of the study, based on pre-selected inclusion and exclusion requirements (Schneider *et al.* 2014: 113-114). Also referred to as criterion-based selection by qualitative researchers like LeCompte and Schensul (2010, cited in Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 97); these criteria directly reflect the purpose of the study and guides it, in the identification of information-rich cases. Therefore, it involves deciding on the attributes of the sample, which is crucial within the context of the objectives of the study and then identifying the individuals that meet the criteria.

#### 3.9.2.1 Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria are a set of conditions that must be met, or specific characteristics that persons, population or elements need to be possess, in order to participate in a study (Schneider *et al.* 2014: 114; Daniel 2015: 514). The inclusion criteria for each of the two samples included in the study are listed below:

**Sample 1**

(i) Academic administrators who have demonstrated commitment to CE, through their statements, addresses and initiatives.
(ii) Academic administrators who are willing to participate in the study.

**Sample 2**

(i) Academics who have a prior history of their work and commitment towards CE.
(ii) Academics who are willing to participate in the study.

#### 3.9.2.2 Exclusion criteria

Exclusion criteria are a set of conditions that disqualify elements from participation (Daniel 2015: 514). In other words, exclusion criteria identify characteristics that deem a participant inappropriate for inclusion in a study (Schneider *et al.* 2014: 114) The exclusion criteria for each of the two samples included in the study are as listed below:

**Sample 1:**

(i) Academic administrators who have had a recent appointment at the HEI (less than 6 months from the initiation of data collection).

**Sample 2:**

(i) New appointees who have been at the HEI for less than 6 months (from the initiation of data collection).
(ii) Academics who have never been a part of any CE effort at the department/faculty/school.

### 3.9.3 Procedure adopted for recruiting samples for the study

To recruit samples for the study, it was mandatory to first receive full ethical approval by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). This was aligned with the ethical protocols put in place by the university for the conduction of research studies. While I received the provisional ethics approval in November 2021; in order to gain full ethical approval, I was required to submit gatekeeper permission letters from all the eight (8) HEI's selected for the study. Gatekeepers are individuals at the study site, who provide access to the site and allow or permit the study to be done, and therefore, their approval is critical to initiate the study (Creswell 2014: 188). This was an important requirement as it marked the due consent of appropriate authorities and the institutions they represented, with respect to the participation in the study.

To get these permission letters, I got in touch with the appropriate authorities at the institutions (through email and personal communications) and shared a formal letter (Appendix 1), requesting permission to conduct interviews. She also provided them with the full background of the study. This was supplemented with the letter(s) of

information for sample 1 and 2 (Appendices 2 and 3) and the consent form (Appendix 4). In this context, any additional enquiries by the authorities/institutions were also duly addressed. Therefore, after securing the provisional ethics approval by IREC (Appendix 5); all gatekeeper permission letters as mandatory for full approval were sought and received by in January 2022. These letters were subsequently submitted to IREC to gain full ethical approval, which was granted in February 2022 (Appendix 6). The ethical clearance number for the study was IREC 202/21. Once the final ethics approval was granted by IREC; the recruitment process for the study was initiated. The procedure for recruiting the participants for the study comprised of three steps, which are detailed below:

**Step 1: Initiation of conversations between the gatekeepers and the researcher**

As the first step in the process of recruitment, the senior most authority in the management of the selected HEI's (Vice-chancellor/Registrar, Dean; depending on their availability) was contacted again through email to secure an appointment for a face-to-face visit at the HEI. In this communication, the objective of the study and the requisite details (including the necessary documentation such as the letter(s) of information for sample 1 and 2 and consent form) were shared again for their easy reference. They were also apprised with regards to the need to conduct interviews for the two samples, and their help was requested in this regard. A copy of the full ethical approval received by IREC was also shared with the authorities in this communication. After securing an appointment from the authority, travel was organized to the HEI, and I met the authority at the date and time given by the former.

**Step 2: In-person meeting between the gatekeeper and the researcher for recruitment of participants for sample 1**

At the meeting with the necessary authority, a brief context of the study was provided, and their help was sought for identifying participants for sample 1. This was done with the assumption that they had the best information on suitable participants. Here, the stipulated inclusion and exclusion criteria were also clearly articulated, for the selection of participants for the sample. This then ensured that the identification or nomination of the participants for the interviews was done by the senior HEI authority and not me. With respect to the willingness to participate, the identified participants were briefed

on all details of the research study and only those who consented to the process, were included in the final sample.

**Step 3: Recruitment of participants for sample 2**

For the recruitment of participants for sample 2, both the senior HEI authority and the participants of sample 1 (with due permission from the senior HEI authority) were consulted for identification of the potential interviewees. While at some HEI's, the senior HEI authority assisted with this aspect; at others, help for same was sought from the participants of sample 1, to purposively sample participants (this was based on the assumption that they would have the best information on the most suitable participants for sample 2). This ensured that the requisite management authority or participants from sample 1 identified and recruited the participants for sample 2, and not me. In terms of the willingness to participate, the participants who were identified were filled in with all the details of the research study and only those who consented to the process, were included in the final sample.

Therefore, participants for both the samples were recruited through the appropriate management authority at the institutions. While seeking assistance from the relevant authority for the recruitment of participants for both the samples, all inclusion and exclusion criteria were shared for their reference. For criteria pertaining to the employment history of a participant; assistance from the human resource department was sought, after getting due permission from the respective authority. Once the initial samples were recruited, further recruitment of participants continued (with help from competent authority) until data saturation. This, however, extended only to those who met the inclusion criteria of the respective sample.

Considering the qualitative research paradigm, the aspect of gaining access to the study setting and establishing rapport with the research participants holds much importance, as these constitute ways of ensuring rich and in-depth data from the participants (Creswell 2013: 151).

### 3.9.4 Overview of the sampling process

Daniel (2012: 1) referred to the sampling process as comprising of 6 major steps:

The first step included preparations to be done for making sampling choices (Daniel 2012: 5). This involves conducting a careful review by of the purpose and objective of the study, along with considering the research design and ethical and legal implications (Daniel 2012: 5). In the context of the study and as elaborated in the aforementioned sections, I carefully considered all aspects, which led to the decision of adopting a qualitative approach to achieve the research objectives.

The second step involved making a choice between selecting the whole population or a specific sample (Daniel 2012: 5). Considering the exploratory nature of the study, which sought to understand the conceptualization and institutionalization of CE at Indian HEI's; I decided to select a small sample, which could provide detailed, in-depth information on the research topic.

The third step involved making a choice between the type of sampling strategy to be chosen for the study (Daniel 2012: 6). Given the qualitative nature of the study at hand, and its objective to seek information rich data and insights on the positioning of CE in Indian HEI's, by selection of the most appropriate participants (non-random); I adopted the strategy of non-probability sampling for the study.

The fourth step involved selecting the type of non-probability/probability sampling design to be employed (Daniel 2012: 6). For the study at hand, I chose purposive sampling to be the most appropriate in the context, to consciously and carefully select those participants, who were most likely to provide rich data. This was subject to satisfying the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined (for ensuring the selection of the most appropriate participants in the given context).

The fifth step involved determining the sample size, that is, the number of elements to be selected in a given sample (Daniel 2012: 7). For the study at hand, a total number of 21 participants (n=21) were selected for sample 1 and for sample 2, a total number of 29 participants (n=29) were selected. Therefore, a total of 50 participants (n=50) were selected for the study.

The sixth and the final step involved the implementation of the sampling plan, in line with the preparatory steps. Concrete details on the implementation of the sampling plan (including decisions on the constituents for each of the sample, defining criteria for inclusion and exclusion and conducting participant recruitment at the study site

(HEI's), through the assistance of gatekeepers) in this study have been elaborately described in section 3.8.1.

Till this point, this chapter discussed in detail, all the considerations, nuances and approaches with respect to the sampling strategy and process. Moving ahead, the next section details the process of data collection, as adopted in the context of the study.

## 3.10 Data collection

Data collection refers to a systematic process of collating information on 'variables of interest' which enables the researcher to fulfil the defined research objectives, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes (Kabir 2016: 202). Further, data collection also broadens one's own understanding (about the interesting phenomenon, problem or process), explains the 'unknown', and adds new knowledge to the existing knowledge (Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard 2014: 37; Flick 2018d: 7). In the context of qualitative research, data collection refers to the selection and production of linguistic (or visual) material for analysing and understanding phenomenon, social fields, subjective and collective experiences and the related meaning-making processes (referring to subjective or social meanings) (Flick 2018d: 15).

Qualitative data typically refers to information that is captured by 'words', and is used to describe, categorize, label and identify qualities of observed phenomenon (Given 2008: 190; Nishishiba, Jones and Kraner 2014: 91). Schneider *et al.* (2014: 115) referred to such data as 'direct data', which includes recordable, spoken or written words and observable body-language, actions and interactions, which is by far, the most common form of data in qualitative research. Flick (2018b: 205) referred to this as 'verbal' data, an umbrella term covering the variety of data that primarily consists of words, and results from various methodological approaches, where participants speak about events, their experiences, their views or practices. Many authors have written about the multiplicity of data collection methods, under the banner of qualitative research, such as observations, interviews, focus group, field notes/diary accounts (or participant journaling), storytelling, autobiographical writing, etc. (Hatch 2002: 72; Carter and Henderson 2005: 215; Adams, Khan and Raeside 2014: 127; Schneider *et al.* 2014; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 77). Among these, semi-structured in-depth interviews

and focus-groups, are very commonly used in qualitative research studies (Gill *et al.* 2008: 291; Sutton and Austin 2015: 227; Flick 2018b: 61).

Further, Saldana (2011: 32) and Issacs (2014, cited in Schneider *et al.* 2014: 116) posited that many, if not most, qualitative research studies rely on interviews with participants. Similar views were shared by Barrett and Twycross (2018: 63), who said that conducting interviews with participants is a characteristic of many qualitative studies. As a result, it is one of the most widely used methods in qualitative research (Creswell 2014: 239; Nishishiba, Jones and Kraner 2014: 101; Durdella 2019: 213). An interview is a two-way conversation, in which the interviewer asks the participants, a series of questions, for collecting data and learning about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 92-93).

Therefore, interviews are an effective way of soliciting and documenting an individual's perspectives, feelings, opinions, values and beliefs about their personal experience and that of the social world, in their own words (Saldana 2011: 32). It allows the researcher to interact with the participant at a personal level, and capture the insights as qualitative data, while developing a deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Nishishiba, Jones and Kraner 2014: 101). Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Hatch 2002: 91-92) presented an elaborate articulation of the five outcomes emerging out of the interview process as: (i) here and now constructions (participants explanations of events, activities, feelings, motivations, concerns); (ii) reconstructions (explanation of past events and experiences); (iii) projections (explanation of anticipated experiences); (iv) triangulation (verification or extension of information from other sources); and, (v) member checking (verification or extension of information developed by the researcher).

Hatch (2002: 71) listed three types of interviews, as informal interviews, formal interviews and standardized interviews. Flick (2009: 150) outlined five types of interviews, namely, focused interviews, semi-standardized interviews, problem-centred interviews, expert interviews and ethnographic interviews. Further, Nieuwenhuis (2016: 93); Lichtman (2014: 248); Schneider *et al.* (2014: 116); and Barrett and Twycross (2018: 63) shared that interviews in qualitative research can be categorized into three types: unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. Notwithstanding the different types, the aim of qualitative

interviews is to see the world through the eyes of the participant, in order to obtain 'rich, descriptive data', that helps the researcher to understand the participant's construction of knowledge and social reality (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 93).

In the context of this study, I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews for collecting data. Details on this type of interview along with the rationale for this choice, is detailed in the following sub-section.

### 3.10.1 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

A semi-structured interview (often recognized as a gold standard method of data collection in qualitative research studies), is similar to a conversation between two individuals (the researcher and the interviewee, in this context), where they discuss a topic of mutual interest (Morris 2015: 3). Here the researcher asks questions and follows up on the responses of the interviewee, for extracting as much information as possible, on the topic on which the latter has expertise and one in which the researcher is interested in (Morris 2015: 3). Such interviews should ideally be conducted as a free-flowing interaction, where the interviewer allows the interviewee a good deal of leeway, while discreetly gathering all information on the designated topic and within the allocated time (Morris 2015: 3). To do so, semi-structured interviews cover a range of questions, relevant to the topic at hand, and provide an added opportunity to gather in-depth responses that reflect the insights of the interviewee (Polonsky and Waller 2019: 204).

The term 'semi-structured' refers to the ability of such interviews to probe issues (asking interviewees to elaborate or explain an answer), pursue unexpected/emerging lines of enquiry, and engage in clarification (Morris 2015: 3; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 93; Polonsky and Waller 2019: 204). Such interviews (normally conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time) employ a blend of closed and open-ended questions and are often accompanied by follow-up 'why' or 'how' questions (Adams 2015: 493; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 93). Also known as a guided interview, semi-structured interviews involve developing a general set of questions and format, which is then used with all participants (Lichtman 2014: 248), while also allowing flexibility for the interviewer to follow leads and areas of interest (Schneider *et al.* 2014: 116). While the length of such interviews varies; usually an hour's appointment is made,

which is considered a reasonable maximum length, for minimizing the fatigue of both the researcher and the interviewer (Adams 2015: 493; Morris 2015: 4). However, the final time taken depends mainly on the depth of the interviewee's answers, the topic and skill of the interviewer (Morris 2015: 4).

Therefore, while qualitative interviews may range from unstructured to highly structured, in-depth interviews require discussions with the study participants in as much detail as possible. In doing so, they are able to fully capture an individual's experience, beliefs, behaviour and meaning in order to explore the research questions and also explore the range of variation among individuals to carve out patterns of similarity or difference (Schensul 2008: 524). These interviews can be open-ended initially and gradually move towards semi-structured interview schedules, in which a group of participants are asked the same questions and responses are compared for identifying variations as well as patterns of commonality (Schensul 2008: 524). The most important consideration here is that the participants are allowed to frame answers in their own words and at length, which enables the researcher to understand their meanings, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (Schensul 2008: 524).

Hence, semi-structured in-depth interviews can be seen to offer a number of advantages for qualitative researchers. In addition to providing an opportunity to capture in-depth reflections and insights of the interviewee; it gives the interviewer the flexibility to vary the questions as the situation demands (despite having a common structure for all participants), which makes semi-structured interviews quite popular with qualitative researchers (Carter and Henderson 2005: 218; Lichtman 2014: 248; Barrett and Twycross 2018: 63). Further, semi-structured in-depth interviews are also well suited for several valuable tasks, particularly when few of the open-ended questions require follow-up queries (Adams 2015: 493). However, such interviews also have some disadvantages, in that they are time consuming and labour-intensive and involve an arduous task of analysing huge volumes of notes and transcripts (Adams 2015: 493). It also requires the researcher to maintain focus, both on the objective of the interview and the interviewee's previous comments (Scanlan 2020: 2). To do so, the researcher also needs to be flexible and responsive, to deal with unanticipated issues (Scanlan 2020: 2).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are based on an interview guide, with typically five to eight broad questions, with probes to supplement them if the researcher feels that the participants are having difficulty in elaborating their perspectives (Marks and Yardley 2004: 41). These questions are meant to elicit lengthy personal accounts rather than brief or abstract explanations (Marks and Yardley 2004: 47). Administering the same set of questions to all participants within the sample, allows the researcher to compare across interviews, while simultaneously permitting each participant to move into uncharted territory and have their line of thinking pursued (Marks and Yardley 2004: 41). Further, while the order of the questions may vary; the probes cannot be standardized as they try to pursue what a particular participant says (Marks and Yardley 2004: 41). These set of questions form what is known as an interview guide (Flick 2018b: 217).

Considering these arguments, I deemed semi-structured, in-depth interviews, to be the perfect fit for collecting data for the study at hand, and used the interview guide, as the tool to support the interview process. This choice has a primary relation with the nature of the study at hand, and the research objectives identified (Adams 2015: 494; Morris 2015: 8; Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021: 1361). As I intended to explore a new study inquiry, linked to CE in the context of Indian HEI's (particularly its conceptualization and institutionalization), semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate. They allowed her to delve into open, but deep conversations with academics on the topic, and to seek their insights, reflections, experiences and beliefs with regards to the same (Morris 2015: 5; Polonsky and Waller 2019: 204). By the very nature of its design, semi-structured interviews ensured that the process was pursued as a smooth conversational dialogue, where the interviewees were given sufficient time to share their opinions, and that they were comfortable enough to share their personal experiences (Adams 2015: 493; Morris 2015: 3; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 93)

I also chose the interview guide to guide the conduction of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the academics at HEI's. The guide helped me to conduct the interviews successfully, as it enabled the conversations through open-ended questions, together with the flexibility of adding on follow-up/probing questions (Adams 2015: 497). In using the latter, I was able to traverse deeper into a particular area of questioning, thereby enabling clarity and adding to the information already shared (Morris 2015:

10) Further details on this tool, and how it was developed in the context of the study is elaborated in the sub-section that follows.

### 3.10.2 Data collection tools

Data collection instruments, also called as ‘guides’; refer to researcher tools used to gather information in the field, such as interview protocols, interview guides, focus group protocols, observation guide and structured journal guides (Durdella 2019: 216). Essentially, such guides may be referred to as a rubric, which researchers use as they plan to conduct an interview (Lichtman 2014: 271). Such instruments facilitate one’s access to information and regulates the interactions in the field (Durdella 2019: 217). In qualitative research, data collection instruments or guides are developed by the researcher, and links directly to the research questions, research problem and former relevant literature, while emerging from the research design and responding to the unique needs of the participants (Pedersen *et al.* 2016: 631; Durdella 2019: 219). Therefore, when designing interview guides, pre-existing knowledge about the research topic is essential (Pedersen *et al.* 2016: 631).

Gill *et al.* (2008: 64) posited that while designing such an interview guide/schedule, it is imperative to ask questions that are likely to yield as much information as possible, on the phenomenon being studied, along with addressing the aim and objectives of the research. Therefore, the interview guide consists of a list of issues and questions to be addressed in an interview, with some degree of flexibility (Nishishiba, Jones and Kraner 2014: 101). Each interview question should be clearly connected to the purpose of the research and should reflect the researcher’s deliberate progression towards a full and in-depth exploration of the phenomenon being studied (Galletta 2013: 45). In line with these arguments and building on the exhaustive literature reviewed, two distinct and unique interview guide(s) were developed aligned with the objectives of the study, for the two samples selected.

The interview guide may provide minimal directions (leading to less structured interviews); or elaborate specifications to ensure coverage of researcher’s topics of interest (corresponding to structured interviews) (Given 2008: 469) Positioned in-between these two types, are interview guides meant for semi-structured interviews, comprising of a general framework for the interview, while also allowing the

researcher, the freedom to pursue questions in a different order (Given 2008: 469). This also allows allocating more time to some questions (as compared to others), based on their appropriateness, for discussing the research topic with the participant (Given 2008: 469).

For exploring data grounded in participants experience, as well as data that is theory driven; Galletta (2013: 46), proposed the use of three segments within an interview protocol or guide: *opening segment* (creating space for narrative grounded in participant experience); *middle segment* (questions of greater specificity, directly related to the research objectives); and the *closing segment* (revisiting the opening narrative for important theoretical considerations and moving towards closure). Nishishiba, Jones and Kraner (2014: 101) similarly shared that many qualitative research experts recommend using the following three segments in the interview guide: *introduction* (including aspects of informed consent, confidentiality and participant permission), *main interview questions and possible probing questions*, and a *conclusion*. Further, Lichtman (2014: 271) outlined that most guides contain several different categories or topics: biographical/demographical information, topics to be covered, different types of questions (related to knowledge, opinion, feeling and experience), including the element of flexibility, allowing to iterate the questions.

These literary arguments fed into the design of the interview guide, wherein I carefully decided the organization and flow of questions. Accordingly, I divided the interview guide (for both the samples) into five sections: (i) *General perspectives* (on the vision/mission of the HEI and the perspective on CE); (ii) *conceptualization of CE*, (iii) *institutionalization of CE*, (iv) *operationalization of CE and best practices* (including focused and targeted questions related to the topic; and (v) *final questions* (mainly on the lines of closing the interview, filling in any information gaps and ways forward). The two interview guides are attached as Appendices 7 and 8. Further, adhering with the CE values of respect and inclusivity, the data collection tool in this case, which was the interview guide, was tested with CE leaders, both in the university and the community (Bhagwan 2019: 5).

### 3.10.3 Procedure for data collection

This section is dedicated to the process of data collection, with special emphasis on two aspects: preparation phase (sub-section 3.9.3.1) and conduction of the interviews (sub-section 3.9.3.2).

#### 3.10.3.1 Preparation phase

According to Roulston and Choi (2018: 237); the preparation for conducting qualitative interviews involves five steps: (i) *ethical review*, (ii) *formulating interview guides*, (iii) *reflection on the topic*, (iv) *technology*, and (v) *recruitment.*

Prior to conducting interviews with people, and as the *first step* in the process, the researcher must gain permission to conduct research with human subjects with the ethics review board with which they are affiliated (Roulston and Choi 2018: 237). Consequently, in the context of this study, I followed similar protocols, and sought the approval from the IREC at DUT (as mentioned earlier in section 3.8.3). Once the final ethical approval was received from the IREC (Appendix 6), I commenced with the study in the field.

The *second step* in the preparation phase is the formulation of interview guides, in tune with the specific research contexts (Roulston and Choi 2018: 237). Typically, such guide(s) are often required by the ethical review board to gain permission to conduct the study (Roulston and Choi 2018: 237). Accordingly, during the phase of research proposal preparation, I drafted two interview guides (for sample 1 and 2) (as mentioned in section 3.9.2) and submitted them as attachments along with the proposal. Further, formulating an interview guide involves generating a list of questions, related to the research topic and research objectives, and ones which are likely to elicit descriptions and speak to the research questions posed (Roulston and Choi 2018: 237). In line with this, I took great care in further refining the interview guides. They were revised multiple times, under the guidance of my supervisor; and was only finalized once me, my supervisor and co-supervisor were satisfied with the quality, number, order and flow of questions, and their appropriateness in fulfilling the defined research objectives.

The *third step* in the preparatory phase involved reflection on the topic , considering that they rely on their own knowledge of the topic, for answering questions and formulating follow-up prompts (Roulston and Choi 2018: 237). However, this preparation is different for researchers who have little knowledge on the topic (who then need to explore more), to those who already have an insider's perspective (requiring them to reflect and think about one's own preconceptions about a topic, what one already knows, or one's own experiences) (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238). In the context of this study, I positioned herself somewhere in between these two extremes, where she felt that while she had some knowledge on the topic; it was far from exhaustive. Accordingly, she familiarized herself with the literature on CE in higher education, while reflecting on her prior experiences and assumptions. In doing so, she also made conscious efforts to rule out any previously held notions or beliefs in this regard. This helped me to remove any bias from the process, while allowing herself to prepare better for the forthcoming data collection process.

The *fourth step* in the preparation phase involved ensuring that the requisite technology needed for conducting and recording interviews was in place and functioning smoothly (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238). Researchers prepare for the technical requirements of interview, by selecting and testing the equipment that they plan to use to record the interviews (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238). Goffman (2014, cited in Roulston and Choi 2018: 238), mentioned the use of a digital recording device to audio record interviews. Taking cue from this, I examined the best quality audio recording devices available in the market, and after testing the equipment and being satisfied with the performance; she finally selected a device to record her interviews. However, I also used the recording function in her smartphone simultaneously (especially in the first few interviews); in case the device malfunctioned at any point during the conduct of the interviews (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238).

Roulston and Choi (2018: 238) attributed the *fifth and the final step* in the preparatory phase, as referring to the recruitment of the participants for the study, through emails, fliers or advertisements. It also involves getting in touch with the participants of the study and arranging for a suitable meeting place (or an interview setting); one which is quiet, free from distraction, and allows for good quality audio recordings (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238). Accordingly, once the list of participants for both sample 1 and

sample 2 were drawn from the respective HEI's (under guidance of the relevant management authority) (as detailed in sub-section 3.8.3); a formal communication through email was shared with each of the nominated participants.

Similar to the introductory email to the gatekeeper; the email to the interview participants again reiterated all the basic details of the study, while informing them of their nomination by the appropriate authority and sharing the letter(s) of information and consent form. This email communication was then followed up with a personal phone call (after receiving their consent on email) to further explain the objectives of the interview, request for a convenient date and time, and share the time duration fixed for the same (ranging between 50 to 60 minutes). In this communication, I also requested for a noise free and appropriate place where the interview could be conducted (which was mostly the personal offices of the academics; or the conference room at HEI's, whenever it was not possible to conduct interviews in the offices), as per the comfort, convenience and preference of the participants (McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl 2019: 1003).

#### 3.10.3.2 Conduct of the interview

This phase in the interview-based data collection process broadly refers to three aspects: (i) *obtaining consent and permission*, (ii) *asking questions for the interview* and (iii) *cross-cultural interviewing and translation (where needed)* (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238-239).

Prior to beginning the interview process, the researcher needed to explain to the participants what the research is about, and gain their informed consent for participation in the study (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238), along with seeking the permission to audio-record the interview. In line with the protocols, before beginning each of the interviews (for sample 1 and sample 2), I shared the letters of information with the participants for their perusal, and the consent form for their signatures. If needed and as and when asked by the participants, I also explained the purpose and objectives of the study and addressed any queries that the participant had. Following this, their permission was also sought for audio-recording the interview; after re-assuring the participants that data collected would be kept confidential and participants' identity kept anonymous. Further, it was also made explicit that the

recording was solely meant to be used by me and only for the transcription process. It was further explained that these transcripts would be used to analyse the information emerging from the interview process, which would then form the basis of the findings emerging from the research study. In this regard, I also addressed any other questions that the participants had, with respect to processing the information and use of data.

Once all the paperwork and procedural formalities were taken care of and formal introductions done, I initiated the interview process. I was guided by the questions, as per the interview guide. Here, the use of simple and generic, to more concrete and specific questions, enabled the participants to settle down comfortably in the process, attune with the questions, and also develop confidence and rapport to provide rich information and insights, related to the research topic (Gill *et al.* 2008: 292). Where needed, suitable probing questions were asked to attain more details or seek clarity, and to ensure that the conversations remained strictly aligned to the research agenda (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 93). I also took elaborate notes in the process. Finally, the closure of the interview process, comprised of a recapitulation, adding on any missing pointers and seeking suggestions for other prospective participants, whom I could also interview. This was done keeping in mind the principle of data saturation until new themes, codes or information with respect to the research topic, ceased to emerge (Daniel 2012: 247; Hennink and Kaiser 2022: 2). While I ensured that adequate time was given to the participants to understand and process the questions and provide answers, most of the interviews lasted between 50-60 minutes.

Further, since there were no significant differences with respect to my culture and that of the participant, and with the medium of English being uniformly used across all interviews; the need for cross-cultural interviewing or the use of translators or culture-specific natives was not felt. Conscious attempts were also made to align the process of data collection, with the CE values of integrity and trust (Bhagwan 2019: 4,6). This was ensured by way of the interviews process being kept fully transparent, with the participants being informed of every facet and outcome of the study, which was also in line with the ethical considerations that were taken fully care of, before and after the conduction of interviews. Further details on ethical considerations are discussed in sub-section 3.13.

### 3.10.4 Timeline of data collection process followed in the study

The data collection for the study began in March 2022 and was completed by November 2022. The process was staggered over a period nine months, and was divided into four phases: (i) first phase: March 2022; (ii) second phase: July 2023; (iii) third phase: September 2023 and the (iv) fourth phase: November 2023. This phase-wise staggering of the process was done mainly to have sufficient time to seek appointments and conduct interviews at HEI's (considering the busy schedule of academics), and engage in quality data collection, by way of adequately paced interviews. This also enabled reflections and taking stock of the process and progress, before moving on to the next phase. In each of the four phases, two HEI's were covered. Between phase one and phase two, I took a break of two months, primarily owing to the summer vacations at the Indian HEI's (in the months of April-May), which meant the unavailability of academics for interviews. Therefore, the data collection process could not be pursued during this time. I utilized this time to work on two aspects: *firstly*, critically assess her first experience of data collection in phase one, for identifying gaps, assessing the progress and defining room for improvement; and *secondly*, initiating the process of preliminary transcription of raw data from the interview recordings, to track her progress and the flow of conversations, and take note of the gaps, while preparing for data collection in the forthcoming phases.

## 3.11 Data analysis

Data analysis is an integral part of qualitative research and constitutes an important step towards gathering data and linking one's findings with higher order concepts (Given 2008: 186). Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014: 239) referred to data analysis as processes associated with understanding the meaning emerging from the various datasets collected during the process of data collection. Therefore, the process of data analysis primarily involves making sense of the data collected, and preparing the data for analysis, conducting differential analysis, moving deeper and deeper into the understanding of data, representing the data and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell 2014: 245). This section on data analysis therefore, touches upon four aspects; (i) data capturing and organization (sub-section 3.10.1); (ii) data analysis in qualitative research (sub-section 3.10.2), and (iii) thematic analysis (pertaining to the data analysis technique used in the study) (sub-section 3.10.3):

### 3.11.1 Data capturing and organization

For both the samples and across all interviews, the data obtained was digitally recorded on an audio-recording device. Post the interview, the data were labelled, for ease of identification and for convenience in the data analysis stage. Different data sets (field notes, interview data) were kept separately and marked clearly in terms of its identifying characteristics (when, how, where and why it was collected) (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115). Materials dealing with the same batch of data, and from individual interviews (corresponding to the respective sample) was separately stored and maintained in separate folders and files, from each respective HEI (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115). Data in each of the files and folders were labelled for facilitating easy retrieval and for examining the broader context where the data came from (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115). Here, each participant was assigned a pseudonym and the same was used to mark all the data with regards to that particular participant (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115). The data was stored on multiple platforms (memory card of the digital recorder, researcher's laptop and hard disc drive (password protected). This was done to ensure that there were multiple back-ups for the data. Further, I also ensured that all these platforms (recorder, laptop and hard disk drive) were placed in safe and secure locations at all times, with access only to me, for the entire duration of the study. When not in use, these were securely locked in a safe, again, only accessible to me.

The next step in the process involved taking data from the spoken text (emerging from interviews) and converting it into written form for analysis (Stuckey 2014: 6). Typically, this is handled through de-identifying the participants and transcribing the data, which is also considered as the first step in the process of data analysis (Stuckey 2014: 6). The process of transcription, therefore, involves getting the dialogue or narrative off the devices, on which it is recorded, into a proper formatted document, with clear researcher defined column for notes (Grbich 2012: 20). Here, it is important to note that all audio recordings must be transcribed verbatim, and written down word to word (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115).

Further, as data analysis runs concurrent with the data collection process (Miles, Huberman and Saladana 2014: 78), the former begins immediately after the first interview (for examining if participants are responding to the research questions, or if

the interview guide needs refining, and most importantly, to determine what has been learnt and what still needs elaboration) (Stuckey 2014: 6). Therefore, the accuracy with which the transcription is done, plays a key role in determining the accuracy of the data that is analysed and with what degree of dependability (Stuckey 2014: 6). Castleberry and Nolen (2018: 808) also opined that while transcription can help the researcher to save time, it also helps the latter to gain a sense of the entirety of the data and to know it intimately. It is also an excellent way to familiarise oneself with the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87).

In the context of the study, the data from the interviews were transcribed with the help of audio-recordings from the digital recorder (Roulston and Choi 2018: 238). The data was transcribed verbatim, to ensure that the originality and the depth of the information was maintained (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115). The audio-recordings were heard multiple times, before the preparation of the transcripts, for ensuring that the final ones were prepared accurately. The hard copies of the transcript (printed for use in the data analysis process), was safely stored in a locked cupboard.

### 3.11.2 Data analysis in qualitative research

Qualitative research is often seen as an inductive approach, where questions tend to be exploratory or open ended and data is often in the narrative form (Grbich 2012: 26). Therefore, analysis in a qualitative context tries to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values and feelings, in an attempt for approximating their construction of a given phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 109). As a result, the outcomes sought are the development of explanatory concepts and models, which are theoretically underpinned, where uniqueness is favoured, and widespread generalization is avoided (Grbich 2012: 26). Therefore, qualitative data analysis is a long and detailed process, involving steps that include processing and transcribing data, de-identifying and storing data files, segmenting and coding transcribed data, identifying thematized patterns, and developing theorized storylines (Durdella 2019: 262). Simply put, qualitative data analysis involves an inductive exploration of the data to identify recurring themes, patterns and concepts, and then describing and interpreting those categories (Nassaji 2015: 130).

Flick (2014: 5) proposed a general definition of qualitative data analysis, which emphasizes the transition from data to meanings or representations: ‘qualitative data analysis is the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) materials to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making (referring to subjective or social meanings) in the material and what is represented in it'. It combines approaches of rough analysis of the material (overview, condensation, summaries) with approaches of a detailed analysis (elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations or elaborate structures) (Flick 2014: 5). Therefore, qualitative data analysis aims to describe a phenomenon in some or greater detail, comparing cases with respect to commonalities and differences, and develop a theory of the phenomenon under study, from the analysis of empirical material (Flick 2014: 5-6).

Miles, Huberman and Saladana (2014: 31) viewed the process of qualitative data analysis as three concurrent flows of activity: (i) data condensation, (ii) data display, and (iii) conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and/or transforming the data that appear in full corpus (body) of written field notes, interview transcripts and other empirical materials (Miles, Huberman and Saladana 2014: 31). Data display refers to a compressed, organized assembly of information that enables drawing up of conclusions, involving the decision on rows and columns of a matrix of qualitative data, and deciding which data, in which form should be entered in the cells (Miles, Huberman and Saladana 2014: 31-32). The third and the final stream of activity (conclusion drawing and verification), involves interpreting patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions, which continues until the data collection process is over (Miles, Huberman and Saladana 2014: 32).

On similar lines and building on the ideas proposed by authors mentioned before, Durdella (2019: 271), articulated a three stage (or phase) iterative process of data analysis: (i) preliminary data analysis, (ii) thematic data analysis, and (iii) interpretation.

The initial stages of data analysis in many qualitative research studies, involves a preliminary data analysis (following transcription), which is an ongoing process, that is undertaken every time the data is collected (Grbich 2012: 21). It involves a simple

process of checking or tracking the data to examine what is emerging, identify areas that require follow-up, and actively asking questions on as to where the information is leading the researcher (Grbich 2012: 21). It is a process of engagement with the text, not so much to critique it, or summarize the emerging information; but more to gain a deeper understanding of values and meanings which lie therein (Grbich 2012: 21). This is similar to the argument proposed by Nieuwenhuis (2016: 109), who shared that qualitative data analysis is an ongoing and iterative process (where data collection, processing, analysis, and reporting are intertwined). This is best achieved through a process of inductive analysis of qualitative data, allowing research findings to organically emerge from the frequent, significant and dominant themes, inherent in the raw data, rather than imposing a structural theoretical orientation (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 109). Guided by the aforementioned literary arguments, I engaged in an exhaustive process of preparation of detailed, rich and thick transcripts, emerging from the semi-structured interviews. This was done as part of 'data capturing' and preceded the data analysis process (as mentioned in sub-section 3.10.1).

Thematic analysis generally takes place after the data collection is over and involves the following dimensions: segmentation, categorization and coding, and linking coded segments to identify emerging themes (Durdella 2019: 273). Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Durdella 2019: 273) referred to it, as data reduction or reducing large quantities of data into manageable segments of information, and involves the bulk of the work in the data analysis process. The goal of this phase is to identify patterns in the data, which leads into the next phase of interpretation, which involves drawing and verifying conclusions (Durdella 2019: 273). Further details on this are provided in the next sub-section.

Finally, the interpretation stage involves formulating conclusions about what is seen, by (i) retrieving thematically organized and coded data, and (ii) grouping coded sets into combinations to explore relationships among parts and the whole (Durdella 2019: 273).

Many authors have written about the intrinsic interconnection between the process of data collection and data analysis, and view it as simultaneous, rather than exclusive processes (Liamputtong 2009: 133; Flick 2014: 13; Miles, Huberman and Saladana 2014: 31; Durdella 2019: 213). Therefore, rather than being linear; data analysis is a

recursive process, where the movement is back and forth, as needed (Braun and Clarke 2006: 86) In line with this, Nieuwenhuis (2016: 110) suggested five data analysis strategies to consider, prior to data collection (in order to collect the right type of data for the data analysis process): hermeneutics (understanding or making meaning of textual data as a whole and interpretation of its parts), content analysis, conversation analysis, discourse analysis and narrative analysis. Under hermeneutics, thematic analysis emerges as a popular data analysis strategy, for interpreting meanings embedded in transcribed interviews (Ho, Chiang and Leung 2017: 1758). Liamputtong (2009: 135), outlined the categorizations of qualitative data analysis (based on the type of questions asked in a research study), to be: thematic analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and semiotic analysis.

In the context of this study, 'thick and rich' descriptions of the research topic emerged, as elaborated by the interviewees and transcribed by me. Hence, thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis technique for the study. This is elaborated in the next sub-section.

### 3.11.3 Thematic analysis

In qualitative research, data mostly presents itself in the form of 'words' (Given 2008: 185) or language in the form of extended text, primarily emerging from observations, interviews, documents or artifacts (Miles, Huberman and Saladana 2014: 30). However, this open-ended nature of qualitative data also emerges as a challenge, as textual form of data is more difficult to reduce and identify patterns (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 808). In such cases, thematic analysis has emerged as a popular data analysis strategy across all qualitative designs (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 808). In an attempt to understand how CE is conceptualized and institutionalized at Indian HEI's, I generated thick descriptions of their perceptions and understandings of the process, in the form of elaborate transcripts. As the idea here was to understand and interpret the meanings embedded in these textual data of the manuscript, I adopted the approach of thematic analysis for data analysis in her study.

Thematic analysis is an exclusive method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, through minimal organization, and description of data in rich detail (Braun and Clarke 2006: 79). Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013:

403) referred to thematic analysis as a descriptive, qualitative approach to data analysis. This involves a visual representation of themes, codes, their relationships, a detailed account and description of each theme, their criteria, exemplars and counter examples, and other similar details (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas 2013: 403). Therefore, the idea here, is to organize segmented data into either tabular sections or circles or notes, that represent emerging thematic categories (Durdella 2019: 273). Thematic analysis of open-ended responses, as emerging from transcribed interviews, can explore the context of the research study at great depth, while also allowing flexibility in interpretation, while analysing the data (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 808). Accordingly, Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Durdella 2019: 273), referred to thematic data analysis as comprising of analytic activities, characterizing an intense period of work, for converting raw data into analysed data, which includes: contact summarizing, coding, pattern of coding or clustering, memoing, case meetings and summary, sequential analysis, and the like.

Braun and Clarke (2006: 87) proposed six phases of thematic analysis: (i) *familiarization with the data* (ii) *generating initial codes*, (iii) *searching for themes*, (iv) *reviewing themes*, (v) *defining and naming themes*, and (vi) *producing the report*. Details of each of the phases is elaborated below, which was also used for analysing the data emerging from the study. An explanation of what was done within the six phases, is also embedded in the description below:

#### 3.11.3.1 Phase one: Familiarization with the data

This phase involves deep immersion in the data, which includes ‘repeated reading’ of the data in an active way, for gaining familiarity with the depth and breadth of the content, for searching of meanings and patterns, and so forth (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). Supporting this argument, Nieuwenhuis (2016: 115) opined that a good analysis is dependent on the researcher’s understanding of the data, and therefore, must be read and re-read several times, in order for the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data. Consequently, the researcher develops a greater understanding of phrasing or the meaning of the term, when viewed within the context of the whole (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 808).

Therefore, in the study, I took great care to read and re-read all the transcripts emerging from the interviews (collated in the data capturing phase, as part of preliminary data analysis), including all field notes and self-reflection notes, to get a sense of the entirety of the data and the general emergent ideas and their tone. At this point, I also assessed the credibility of the data, how it will be used and all such general and preliminary thoughts/impressions on the data (also known as memoing), and the possible emergent codes were noted down (Stuckey 2015: 9; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115). Although coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the analysis process, Braun and Clarke (2006: 87) recommended taking such notes, and marking ideas for coding, to which one can go back to, in subsequent phases. Maintenance of such reflective notes, in the form of a journal, proved to be of vital importance in the end stages of the data analysis and research study, as they prompted critical consideration of ideas and insights gained from the study, against the patterns emerging from the data (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 115).

#### 3.11.3.2 Phase two: Generating initial codes

Phase two begins once the researcher has familiarised themselves with the data, and has generated initial ideas about what is in the data, what is interesting about it, and involves the production of initial codes from the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 88). This process involves dis-assembling of data, which refers to taking the data apart, and creating meaningful groupings or codes (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 808). Boyatzis (1998, cited in Braun and Clarke 2006: 88) stated that codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent), that appears interesting to the researcher and therefore, refers to the most 'basic segment of the raw data', which can be assessed in a meaningful way, with respect to the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, coding can be defined as the process by which 'raw data' (in the form of interview transcripts or field notes from observations) is converted into usable data through the identification of themes, concepts, or ideas that have some connection with each other (Austin and Sutton 2014: 439).

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016: 116), coding is a process of reading the transcribed data carefully, line by line, and dividing it into meaningful analytical units. He therefore, defined coding as marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or unique identifying names (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 116). Initially, codes are attached to

units of data that could vary in size (that is, phrase, sentence, paragraph), but usually codes encompass a complete thought, and can therefore, take the form of descriptive label, that directly describes or is taken from the text (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 809). However, while coding is a part of analysis, as it involves organizing the data into meaningful groups; the coded data differs from units of analysis (called as 'themes') which are often broader. These themes are generally developed in the next phase, which involves interpretive analysis of the data.

Accordingly, I built on the impressions of data emerging from phase one and initiated the data coding process. The data was re-organized by allocating a word that best represented a particular category of grouped data, and all similar data were clustered together (Braun and Clarke 2006: 88; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 116). A term or a phrase that best described each cluster of data, was allocated to that data set. Simply put, the data was rearranged into categories, with each category being labelled with an appropriate term, or a 'code'.

#### 3.11.3.3 Phase three: Searching for themes

After all the data has been initially coded and collated, resulting in a full list of different codes identified from the data set; phase three begins, which refocuses the analysis on the broader level of themes, rather than narrow codes (Braun and Clarke 2006: 89). Nieuwenhuis (2016: 120) referred to this process as 'establishing categories (or themes), where the various codes (after they are fully saturated) are categorized into a system to help the researcher make sense of the data. This step in the thematic data analysis process involves sorting the different codes (emerging from phase two) into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded extracts within the identified themes (Braun and Clarke 2006: 89). Castleberry and Nolen (2018: 809) called this step as 'reassembling data' where the code (or category) to which each context is mapped, are then put into context with each other, to create themes. Braun and Clarke (2006: 82) referred to 'themes', as capturing something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. Further, Castleberry and Nolen (2018: 809) proposed a simple explanation of themes and referred to it as 'patterns in the code', as they take numerous pieces of related code to show a bigger picture, with respect to what is being portrayed.

At a preliminary level, Braun and Clarke (2006: 89) recommended the use of tables, mind-maps or thematic maps, for organizing the codes into theme-piles. At a more complex level, Castleberry and Nolen (2018: 809-810) shared that the two ways in which qualitative researchers organize the data into themes, are hierarchies and matrices. Hierarchies are constructed by clustering similar codes to produce higher order codes, and serve as a visual tool, for articulating how themes are subordinate or superordinate to each other. The higher order codes provide the researcher with a view across the broad, thematic landscape of the data, thereby facilitating analysis of the data at multiple levels of granularity (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 810). As hierarchy by definition, includes more than one level; a hierarchical category system not only includes categories, but also puts categories into sub-sets (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 119).

In addition to being an effective way to make sense of the data; a hierarchical category system also offers the advantages of being able to show the type of relationships (spatial, cause-effect, rationale, locus for action, function, means-end, sequence and/or attribution) between subsets of data and sub-categories (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 120). Further, matrices are constructed by arranging the emergent concepts, variables, and data sources for providing a broad visual representation of the data and also for situating it in its broader context (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 810). Further, a tree diagram can also be used for organizing categories, to determine relationships between the latter, and to find patterns in the data and make sense of it (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 120).

In line with the above, the themes and sub-themes related to CE and those emerging from the coded data, were identified and analyzed and the relationships or connections between them were established in a meaningful way. Similar themes were brought together under one set and were also grouped and categorized according to the content they represented. This was done with the help of flowcharts, concept maps, tree diagrams and hierarchies. A title was given to each theme, and a concise explanation for the same was noted down.

#### 3.11.3.4 Phase four: Reviewing themes

This phase involves the refinement of the themes developed in phase three (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). Here, it may appear that, while some of the themes developed are not really themes (in the absence of enough data to support them, or if the data is too diverse); some might collapse into each other (based on similarity); or may be broken down into specific sub-themes (in instances where they are broad and generic) (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). Further, Braun and Clarke (2006: 91) also shared that this phase, includes two levels of analytical work. *Level one* involves reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts, by reading all the collated extracts for each theme and considering if they appear to form a coherent pattern, that confirms if the themes adequately capture the contours of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). *Level two* involves a similar process, but in relation to the entire dataset. Here, in addition to considering the validity of the individual themes (in relation to the data set), it is also assessed if the thematic map accurately reflects the inherent and implicit meanings within the entire datasets (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). Therefore, phase four seeks to fulfil two basic purposes: *firstly*, to ascertain whether the themes work, in relation to the entire data set; and *secondly*, to code any additional data within the themes (that may have been missed in the earlier coding stages). This supports the notion that coding is an ongoing organic process (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). This level of analytical work helps the researcher to have a fairly good idea of the different themes within the data, how they fit together, and the overall story they present about the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91).

Therefore, in the study, and as part of phase four of the analysis, I revisited the extracted codes under each theme, to ascertain if these formed a coherent and consistent pattern, and that the emergent themes exhaustively covered all aspects of the emerging data (*level one*). Further, the validity of themes, in relation to the entire dataset was checked for coherence, accurate reflection of implicit meanings in the datasets, and for capturing any additional themes that might have been missed in the earlier stages (*level two*).

#### 3.11.3.5 Phase five: Defining and naming themes

Once the researcher has a satisfactory thematic map of the data; phase five begins with defining and further refining the themes to be presented for analysis, especially an analysis of the data within them (Braun and Clarke 2006: 92). After the ordering of themes (or, categories) has been completed, the researcher needs to develop definitions for each theme, sub-theme and code, which subsequently helps in discussing and reporting the findings (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 120). To do so, it is a good practice to identify exemplars for each code and theme (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 120). Braun and Clarke (2006: 92) referred to 'defining and refining themes' as identifying the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the overall themes) and determining what aspect of the data, the latter covers. However, they also cautioned that this does not mean merely paraphrasing the contents of the data extracts presented, but clearly identifying and articulating what is of interest about them, and why, particularly in relation to the research objectives.

For each individual theme, the researcher needs to conduct and write a detailed analysis for creating a coherent narrative of how and why the coded data within each theme provides unique insights (as stand-alone and in relation to each other) while contributing to the overall understanding of the research questions (Braun and Clarke 2006: 92; Kiger and Varpio 2020: 852). Castleberry and Nolen (2018: 812) described this step in the data analysis process, as 'interpretation', which is at a level higher than themes and includes discussion of relationship between themes and more global findings in the context of all codes, which is broader and more general than the specific codes, and directly caters to the research questions.

In line with this, I defined and the refined the themes by summarizing the scope and contents within each theme, in line with the research topic and its objectives. Further, a specific, clear and an accurate name was given to each theme, in order to help the reader understand its essence at a glance. Although data interpretation occurred throughout the data analysis process, this step in particular involved making analytical conclusions from the data presented as codes and themes in the previous steps and taking decisions on how to represent them (Braun and Clarke 2006: 92). This enabled her to rationalize as to how the interpretations were drawn from the beginning to the end, and to ensure that they were fair, credible, accurate and representative of the raw

data, and added value to the current literature available on CE at Indian HEI's (Castleberry and Nolen 2018: 814).

#### 3.11.3.6 Phase six: Producing the report

The last step involves the final analysis and write-up of the report, which narrates the complicated story of the data, in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006: 93). King (2004, cited in Kiger and Varpio 2020: 8), referred to this step as a continuation of the analysis and interpretation that has already happened. It was important that the write up of the analysis (including data extracts, i.e., direct quotations from the participants, provided a 'concise, coherent, logical, interesting and non-repetitive story' narrated by the data – within and across themes (Braun and Clarke 2006: 93). Kiger and Varpio (2020: 7) posited that elements of the writing process are already initiated in the early steps in the process, by way of notetaking, description of themes and selection of representative data extracts. However, Braun and Clarke (2006: 93) argued that the write-up needs to do more than just to provide data, with the analytical narrative going beyond data description, and making an argument on how the researcher's explanation richly and fully answers the research question, using narrative descriptions and representative data extracts. In this context, Braun and Clarke (2012, cited in Kiger and Varpio 2020: 8), stated that the direct data extracts used for the purpose of the final analysis, should contain adequate context, which facilitates the understanding of its meaning and be supported by interwoven textual description that explains its importance. Furthermore, through referencing related and extant literature, and situating it within the emergent findings, provides strength to the analysis (Kiger and Varpio 2020: 8).

Consistent with these literary arguments, the emergent themes were weaved into an analytical narrative, specifically to address the research objectives outlined at the beginning of the study. This included provision of a thorough contextual understanding of the conceptualization, institutionalization and operationalization of CE at Indian HEI's, best practices of CE, local interpretation of CE strategies, supported by the literature extracted from an exhaustive literature review on CE in higher education at the global and the Indian level. Finally, the emergent themes and sub-themes were used to develop the components of the framework, outlining the strategies to be

implemented to guide and strengthen the practice of CE in India, which was one of the most crucial outputs of this research study.

## 3.12 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or rigour of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit and Beck 2014, cited in Connelly 2016: 435). In the context of qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to systematic rigor of the research design, the credibility of the researcher, the believability of the findings, and the applicability of the research methods (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Rose and Johnson 2020: 3). Guba and Lincoln (1981, cited in Amankwaa 2016: 121) noted that within the rationalistic paradigm and quantitative research, the criteria for reaching rigor include reliability, validity and objectivity. However, for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Forero *et al.* 2018: 2) created four stringent criteria (also known as the 'four-dimensions criteria'): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (comparable to the aspects of internal validity, reliability, objectivity and external validity, used in quantitative studies). These criteria were adopted to establish trustworthiness in the current study.

### 3.12.1 Credibility

Credibility is important to establish confidence that the results (from the perspective of participants) are true, credible and believable (Lincoln and Guba 1986, cited in Forero *et al.* 2018: 3). Polit and Beck (2014, cited in Connelly 2016: 435) stated that credibility of the study, or confidence in the truth of the study, is the most important criteria. Establishing credibility ensures the congruence of the findings with reality and involves taking steps to ensure that the reader believes in the research findings (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 123). The strategies to ensure credibility of a research study include adoption of well-established research methods, a research design that fits the research question, and a theoretical underpinning that is aligned with the research question/methods. Other methods to establish credibility include frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and supervisor (peer-debriefing), researcher's reflective notes (reflective journaling) and member checks (Connelly 2016: 435; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 123). Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Nieuwenhuis 2016: 123)

shared that credibility is also enhanced by the development of an early familiarity with the participants and the participating organization and through well-defined purposive sampling, detailed data collection methods and triangulation.

Therefore, I made a conscious and informed decision to select qualitative enquiry for the study at hand, including well-defined and rationalized sampling and data collection plans, as elaborated in section(s) 3.8 & 3.9. In addition, and to ensure added credibility of results, there was a conscious and dedicated attempt made towards sustained and quality engagement with the participants before the data collection process. This enabled building confidence and rapport with the participants, while also providing sufficient time to ensure that information-rich and quality data was collected. This continued until data saturation occurred. I also engaged in peer debriefing and reflective journaling, to enhance the credibility of the results. Further, member checks, i.e., checking with participants for ensuring accurate depiction and interpretation of the information shared during interviews was also done (Amankwaa 2016: 124).

### 3.12.2 Transferability

This criterion for rigor assessment extends to the degree to which the results can be generalized or transferred to other settings (Lincoln and Guba 1986, cited in Forero *et al.* 2018: 3). Despite being considered as analogous to generalizability in quantitative research (Connelly 2016: 435); Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Nieuwenhuis 2016: 124) argued that unlike generalizability; transferability does not involve generalized claims, but invites readers of research to make connections between the elements of a study and their own experience or research. There are two strategies employed by qualitative researchers to increase the transferability of a study. *Firstly*, through thick description, i.e., describing a phenomenon, in sufficient detail, to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situation and people (Lincoln and Guba 1985, cited in Amankwaa 2016: 122). The *second* strategy is through purposeful sampling, wherein careful thought is given to selection of participants, with the inherent notion that they represent the entire population, in terms of the study context (Nieuwenhuis 2016: 124).

In the context of the present study, which was qualitative and exploratory in nature and used non-probability sampling methods; blanket transferability of data could be

ensured (considering the varying local contexts in which different types of HEI's operate in India). However, for the data to be applicable in similar contexts and settings, thick description of the study context, including the selection and characteristics of participants, data collection and data analysis, was produced (Connelly 2016: 436). This entailed narration of the story about the research study and its events in sufficient detail, to allow the readers to obtain a vivid picture of the research events (Amankwaa 2016: 122) and assess the applicability (and transferability) of data in similar contexts and settings.

### 3.12.3 Dependability

The rigor criterion of dependability is applied to qualitative research studies to ensure that the findings from the qualitative inquiry are repeatable, if the inquiry occurred within the same cohort of participants, coders and context (Lincoln and Guba 1986, cited in Forero *et al.* 2018: 3). In a similar vein, Polit and Beck (2014, cited in Connelly 2016: 435), stated that dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and over the conditions of the study. It is similar to 'reliability' in quantitative research; but with the understanding that stability of the conditions depends on the nature of the study (Connelly 2016: 435; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 124). Procedures for dependability include maintenance of an audit trail of process logs (researcher's notes/journal of all activities happening and decisions taken in the study, particularly data collection and analysis) and peer de-briefings (Connelly 2016: 435; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 124).

In the context of this study, dependability was ensured by way of maintaining of a dedicated audit trail, consisting of detailed and in-depth descriptions of the methodology used for data collection, and the type of data collected. This included a safe storage of all important documents such as signed consent forms, interview guide(s) and reflective journals/writing logs, in their original form. Further, I also considered the criteria of dependability while approaching the process of data analysis, as she produced elaborate notes while disassembling and reassembling the data, to reach the findings, through thematic analysis.

### 3.12.4 Confirmability

Confirmability extends the confidence that the results would be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Lincoln and Guba 1986, cited in Forero *et al.* 2018:

3). Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Nieuwenhuis 2016: 125) described confirmability as the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the research study findings are shaped by participants and not by researcher bias, motivation or interest. They further suggested some strategies to establish confirmability such as audit trail, triangulation and reflexivity (Amankwaa 2016: 122; Connelly 2016: 435; Nieuwenhuis 2016: 125). Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Amankwaa 2016: 122), referred to an audit trail as a transparent description of the research steps from the beginning of the study to the development and reporting of findings (allowing the researcher to trace the course of the research step by step, via the decisions made and the procedures described).

To ensure confirmability in the present study and to reduce researcher's bias; I confirmed, clarified, and corroborated all information/data with the participants during the interview (which was also recorded and transcribed verbatim). To enhance the dependability criteria, I read, re-read all the transcriptions to ensure accurate representation of bias-free information. To achieve this purpose, triangulation of data was also done. Here, all data sources (audio tapes, transcripts, field notes and reflective journals) were collectively analyzed, so that the findings were mutually supported. Further, I was also careful and conscious of her pre-dispositions and through several strategies such as reflective journaling, research diary, field notes/memos (as detailed in section 3.3), made a conscious attempt to keep her biases at bay. Selection of two different data sources (in the form of two different samples) also helped in triangulating the data, thereby contributing to its confirmability, and reducing the bias of a single data source.

## 3.13 Ethical considerations

Ethics are a fundamental component of any piece of research that involves people (Moriña 2021: 1559). In a qualitative study, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process; and therefore, the importance of protection of human subjects through application of appropriate ethical principles, becomes paramount (Arifin 2018: 30). Therefore, while a code of ethics is formulated to regulate the relations of researchers to the people and fields they intend to study; principles of research ethics ensure that researchers avoid harming participants involved in the research process, by acknowledging and respecting their needs and interests (Flick 2009: 36). In this context, Murphy and Dingwall (2001, cited

in Flick 2009: 37) spoke of an ‘ethical theory’, which they viewed as being linked to four issues/principles: *non-maleficence* (researchers avoid harming participants); *beneficence* (research on human subjects should produce some positive and identifiable benefit, rather than being simply carried out for its own sake); *autonomy or self-determination* (values and decisions of research participants should be respected); and *justice* (all people should be treated equally). These principles were derived from the Nuremberg Code and the Helsinki Declaration (Halse and Honey 2007, cited in Moriña 2021: 1559).

The most common procedure for guaranteeing an ethical study is to submit the research study to an ethical review board (Moriña 2021: 1559). Flick (2009: 39) referred to these boards as ethical committees, who examine the research design and methods, before they can be applied for achieving the broad objective of safeguarding the interests of the participants in the research process. Further, good ethical practice is based on two conditions. *Firstly*, that the researchers conduct their research in accordance with the ethical codes, and *secondly*, the research proposals for such studies have been reviewed by ethics committees for their ethical soundness (Flick 2009: 39). Guillemin and Gillam (2004, cited in Moriña 2021: 1559) referred to these as *ethics in practice* (addressing ethical issues in the everyday context of undertaking a research study) and *procedural ethics* (gaining approval of ethics review board for undertaking a particular research study). The latter comprises one of the first stages of any research process, in majority of countries which have ethics review boards (Moriña 2021: 1559).

Similarly, in the context of the study at hand; the aspect of procedural ethics was addressed as the foremost priority. Accordingly, the research proposal of the study was submitted to IREC at DUT, for gaining full ethical approval of the study. This submission was also accompanied by signed and stamped gatekeeper letters by all HEI’s covered in the study, for perusal by IREC (detailed in sub-section 3.8.3). Finally, the full ethical approval for the study was obtained on 28 February 2022, with the IREC clearance number being IREC 202/21 (Appendix 6). Further, with respect to ethics in practice, the following basic principles of ethically sound research were closely adopted in the study (Flick 2018a: 84):

### 3.13.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Obtaining informed consent from study's participants are aimed at achieving two basic objectives: *firstly*, to ensure that participants are engaging in the study voluntarily and out of their own free will, without any coercion or pressure; and *secondly*, to protect participants from any possible risks and harm (Moriña 2021: 1561). Further, consent forms also oblige researchers to ensure that everyone involved, fully understands the process, by having the fullest possible information of the goals and methods of the research (Flick 2009: 37; Moriña 2021: 1561). Therefore, Connelly (2014, cited in Arifin 2018: 30) stated that to participate in a research study, participants need to be adequately informed about the research process, be able to comprehend the information given, and have the power of freedom or choice to take a decision on whether to participate or decline.

The principle of informed consent was strictly adhered with, in the course of the study. Accordingly, letters of information for participants from both the samples: sample 1 and 2 (attached as appendices 2 and 3) were shared with each participant of the study, prior to the scheduled interviews, which clearly articulated the details of the study, outlining the risks and benefits both. After reading the letter of information, the participants were also requested to furnish a written consent (attached as appendix 4) for their participation in the study, prior to the initiation of the data collection process. However, it was also clarified that the participant had the right to withdraw his/her consent to participate, at any point, during the study. This ethical consideration also adhered to the values of conscience and respect, which embodies the process of CE (Singh et al. 2023: 9). Therefore, the study ensured that CE values are embedded wholly in the conduct of the study as well, which explored different understandings of CE

### 3.13.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The ethical consideration of anonymity or confidentiality in qualitative research guarantees privacy to the participants in a way, that they would not be identified by name or otherwise, and also, that no identifying information about the participant would be revealed in any form of written or other forms of communication (Lincoln 2009: 152; Lichtman 2014: 57). In line with this principle, the anonymity of the institutions selected

for the study and the participants was strictly ensured throughout the duration of the study. The institutions were provided with an encoded name/pseudonym, in the form of alphabetical letters and the participants too, were assigned similar pseudonyms, to ensure that their anonymity was preserved throughout the process (Moriña 2021: 1561). During the data collection and recording phase too, all individual names were removed from all kinds of recordings, field notes and reports. Further, guaranteeing confidentiality means that the information about the participants is only used in a way, which makes it impossible for any person to identify the participants or for any institution to use it against the interest of the participant (Flick 2009: 40). Here, it is important to note that while anonymity also extends to the publication stage of the research; confidentiality needs to be maintained throughout the research process (Moriña 2021: 1562).

Therefore, along with protecting the identity of the participant, I also ensured that the information shared by the participants was safeguarded and protected, at all costs and at all times, during the study and beyond. I ensured that all raw data in the form of recordings and self-reports were securely stored on a password protected USB drive, and no unauthorized person had access to same. On completion of the study, the data will be kept in a locked safe for a period of five years and will be destroyed thereafter. Further, all data stored electronically will also be permanently deleted. In addition to this, the participants were also made aware that the research reports emanating from the study will be written in a manner that no link whatsoever can be established (by the readers) between the information and the participants.

### 3.13.3 Doing no harm and prevention of deception

The principle of ‘do not harm’ stands at the cornerstone of ethical conduct (Lichtman 2014: 57). However, Moriña (2021: 1562) posited that ‘harm’ may be interpreted differently, in different contexts. Accordingly, researchers need to ensure that they do not make malicious use of the information shared by participants in good faith and /or exploit the honesty of the participants, in any way (Moriña 2021: 1562). This was always taken care of during the process of data collection, by limiting the study to strictly professional enquiries, based on the research objectives. Further, the corresponding data was always kept protected and uncompromised. It was also ensured that any information which posed any potential threat to the participant, was

kept strictly confidential, and was available solely to me and was not put to any malicious use at any point during, or after the study (Flick 2018a: 84). Therefore, the well-being of participants was accorded paramount importance throughout the research study.

Further, I also ensured that there was no deception of study participants at any point, as she ensured that all correct information about the objectives and purposes of the research was shared with the participants, prior to the data collection and during the entire study (Flick 2018a: 84). Further, any queries of the participants in this regard were also duly addressed. This transparent communication from about the research process, ensured that there was no misrepresentation of facts or withholding of any information, thereby facilitating the participants to have a complete understanding of the study, based on which they agreed to participate in the same (Flick 2018a: 84).

## 3.14 Conclusion

This chapter presented an elaborate account of the research methodology adopted for the study; with special reference to the exploratory qualitative design chosen for the same. The chapter began with an overview of the research paradigm adopted for the study and an account of my role and reflexivity in the process. This was followed by a description of the study setting and the study population. Further, detailed information was provided on the two sets of samples used, along with the purposive sampling technique adopted. This was complemented by a crisp overview of the sampling process and the sampling plan adopted for the study. Additionally, the data collection process was described, which included an account of the semi-structured in-depth interviews used for gathering data and the tool used (interview guide). Further, the approach to data analysis and the strategy of thematic analysis was described. This was followed by a discussion of the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Lastly, the chapter outlined the ethical considerations and principles that guided the study.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) presents the data, its analysis and the relevant findings that emerged therein.

# CHAPTER FOUR:
# DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters introduced the research topic under investigation (Chapter 1); presented an exhaustive review of literature on same (Chapter 2); and provided an account of the research methodology that guided the study (Chapter 3). The current chapter (Chapter 4) presents a detailed account of the emergent findings from the study, including a critical analysis and discussion of same. In addition to the introduction section, the chapter is organized into the following three sub-sections: interviewee details (section 4.2); followed by an analysis of findings and discussion (section 4.3), and a brief conclusion (section 4.4).

The findings and discussion section, which builds the core of the chapter (section 4.3) emerged from an exhaustive thematic analysis of the data. This included a systematic process of transcription of data; detailed coding and focused coding of the same, using the latter to identify emergent patterns, which was finally used to classify the themes, sub-themes and its sections. This was then subjected to a deeper interpretive analysis, connecting the findings to the holistic context of the study, within the ambit of the research objectives. Finally, relevant literature was used to connect, support, add to or dispute the findings. These findings were then used to develop the framework for guiding and strengthening the field of CE in Indian HEI's, which will be presented in the concluding chapter (Chapter 5).

## 4.2 Interviewee details

As part of the study, interviews were conducted with 50 academics across all the 8 HEI's included in this study. Among them, 21 academics belonged to sample 1 (academic leadership) and 29 academics belonged to sample 2 (faculty members). In terms of gender representation, 28 male academics and 22 female academics were interviewed in total. In the chapter, the excerpts from academic leaders were identified was "AL" (numbered between 1 and 21); while those from faculty members were identified as "FM" (numbered between 1 and 29).

## 4.3 Analysis of findings and discussion

As part of the study, interviews were conducted using a carefully crafted interview guide (refer to appendices 7 and 8), which addressed each of the study's objectives. Probing questions were used to support the original questions, on a case-to-case basis. The same guide was used to conduct interviews with academics belonging to both the study samples, which allowed for the data to be analysed holistically. Here, each of the research objectives emerged as a theme (4) in itself, which was further divided into sub-themes (10) and sub-thematic sections (36), as presented in the following table:

| **THEME 1: Conceptualization of CE in Indian HEI's** | |
|---|---|
| **Sub-Theme** | Sub-Thematic sections |
| **1.1 Understanding the 'why' of CE: Philosophy and rationale** | 1.1.1 Everything in the universe is connected |
| | 1.1.2 Values undergirding the spirit of CE |
| | 1.1.3 The broad mandate of social responsibility in higher education |
| **1.2 Understanding the 'what' of CE: Concepts and their interplay** | 1.2.1 'Community' in CE is subject to diverse interpretations |
| | 1.2.2 'Engagement' in CE involves applying university's knowledge, resources for community development, through varied approaches |
| | 1.2.3 Community context and needs determine CE interventions |
| **1.3 Understanding the 'how' of CE: Process and principles** | 1.3.1 Establishing collaborative partnerships for co-creating knowledge |
| | 1.3.2 Principles underlining CE partnerships |
| | 1.3.3 Co-learning with the community leads to mutuality of benefits |
| | 1.3.4 Provisioning mechanisms to monitor CE implementation |
| **THEME 2: Institutionalization of CE in Indian HEI's** | |
| **2.1 Embedding CE into the institutional culture** | 2.1.1 Framing of an overarching institutional policy on CE |
| | 2.1.2 Crafting of a detailed and clear strategic plan for CE |
| | 2.1.3 Enabling teamwork; combining top-down, bottom-up approaches |
| | 2.1.4 Linking CE with academic learning, within regular curriculum |
| | 2.1.5 Embedding CE across different academic disciplines |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2.2 Embedding CE into the institutional structure** | 2.2.1 Developing common understanding and competencies for CE |
| | 2.2.2 Establishing centralized, institutionally visible CE structures |
| | 2.2.3 Recruiting trained staff under the ambit of CE structures |
| | 2.2.4 Incentivizing CE for faculty members and students |
| | 2.2.5 Provisioning administrative support for CE implementation |
| | 2.2.6 Creation of platforms for knowledge sharing on CE processes |
| **THEME 3: Operationalization of CE at the interface of teaching, research and service functions of HEI's** | |
| **3.1 Operationalization of CE at the interface of the teaching function** | 3.1.1 Specialized courses/programs, aligned with the CE philosophy |
| | 3.1.2 Integration of CE in the existing academic curriculum |
| | 3.1.3 Incorporation of engaged pedagogies in teaching and learning |
| **3.2 Operationalization of CE at the interface of the research function** | 3.2.1 Multiple research approaches, undertaken in partnership with community |
| | 3.2.2 Constituent pillars of community engaged research processes |
| | 3.2.3 Practice of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) being operationalized by CBPR hubs |
| **3.3 Operationalization of CE at the interface of the service function** | 3.3.1 General knowledge sharing with the community |
| | 3.3.2 Specific, targeted interventions in the community |
| | 3.3.3 Services offered through institutional structures/practices |
| **THEME 4: Best practice models of CE in Indian HEI's** | |
| **4.1 Best practice with respect to the institutionalization of CE** | 4.1.1 Engaged educational model, driven by CE aligned policies |
| | 4.1.2 Establishment of a CE structure for managing CE practices |
| | 4.1.3 Synergistic functioning between institutional structures, processes and functions, to enable CE |
| **4.2 Best practice with respect to the operationalization of CE** | 4.2.1 CE in teaching: Nation-wide course on CE and social responsibility |
| | 4.2.2 CE in research: Live-in-Labs program |
| | 4.2.3 CE in service: Establishment of social enterprises |

Table 4.1: Overview of themes, sub-themes and sub-thematic sections

### 4.3.1 Theme 1: Conceptualization of CE in Indian HEI's

Theme 1 explores the conceptualization of CE at Indian HEI's and provides an understanding of CE from the lens of the academics interviewed as part of the study. This understanding mainly fell into the categories of 'why', 'what' and 'how' of CE, which are presented as the following three sub-themes:

**Sub-theme 1.1: Understanding the 'why' of CE: Philosophy and rationale**

As an introduction to the conceptualization of CE in Indian HEI's, the interviewees were asked about their views on the idea of CE and where the idea of CE originated in the university framework. Based on the responses, this sub-theme is accordingly categorized into the following three sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 1.1.1: Everything in the universe is connected***

Many interviewees referred to the idea of CE as originating from the umbrella philosophical orientation that every aspect, being, and activity in the universe is inter-connected. A few excerpts which reflect on this aspect are elucidated below:

*"Every problem is our problem and we have to help others and solve it...we can't run away, saying that it's not my problem; we all are connected together...it's just like a net; the entire universe is like a vibration, where one end of the net is definitely reaching the other end, so, it is our responsibility to see, think and act accordingly" [FM 14]*

*"The society is the entire world…it starts from our home, families and goes on to include the entire world...we are all connected as part of that one society and the more we think about them…our welfare will also happen in the bargain...because we are also a part of it...the moment when a person thinks of him as an individual and as apart or aloof from the society...that is where the problem begins" [AL 17]*

*"The basic pure philosophy of science is also talking about the interconnectedness of things...we are all interconnected with everything…with nature…pure sciences was also always talking about this…but, because of these…chemistry, physics...it all got boxed into those little things…and then people failed to see where the connections*

*are…so now if you see…disciplines like quantum physics is also talking about these things…holistic, inclusive…all that kind of things" [AL 2]*

These excerpts present an interesting intersection of the idea of interconnectedness in the universe, being endorsed both from the perspective of science which is rooted in spirituality/philosophy and one which originates from the physical/natural sciences school of thought. However, irrespective of the individual standpoint, all interviewees agreed that through these inter-connections, we are impacted by each other's actions in a summative manner, and because of these inter-connections, we have a responsibility towards each other.

This argument finds resonance in the writings of several authors. While discussing the Spiritual Canticle, one of the works of the Spanish mystical poet, Saint John of the Cross; Matthew (2021: 26), described that, in the universe, there is an interplay of things, wherein the universe connects, not like the internet or a neutral platform, but more like an oasis or an ecosystem, built on symbiotic dependence. These ideas find reflection in the famous quote by John Muir, which says, 'tug on anything at all and you'll find it connected to everything else in the universe' (Washburn 2008: 3). Similarly, Moore (2017: para. 1 line 5) referred to Hindu Vedic texts, which endorse that everything in the universe begins with a singular essence, which is then fractured into the multiplicity and complexity of the universe, that we witness today. This interconnectedness is also reflected in the African community's belief in the humanist philosophy of Ubuntu, which builds on the notion of 'I am because we are', and emphasizes the universal bonds of sharing and caring (Bhagwan 2019: 5).

Another set of interviewees related this idea of inter-connectedness with the aspect of co-existence of humans with each other and with nature, and linked it to students learning and competencies. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

*"This aspect that we are part of a bigger scheme of things is universal in nature…and this understanding needs to be created among the students, that we have common visions as a collective entity. Aspirations of a better life, a better society, has to be understood by everyone…and the fact that education is a means to achieve these desired changes...is an important part of this collective understanding" [AL 10]*

*"We are a part of one environment...so if anything will happen to the environment, we are the first ones to get impacted...so all nations, organizations and individuals have to work with common goals...it begins with the mindset that we are in co-existence with other human beings and nature at large...this is how we strike at the minds and the thought process of the students...and once this understanding of the larger goals is clear…then community engagement becomes a means to achieve them through educative processes by developing core competencies and skills" [FM 8]*

Three major lessons emerged from these reflections. *First,* the universal ideas of inter-connectedness and co-existence needs to be widely perpetuated and instilled in students; so that they identify themselves as part of the common collective existence. *Second*, this understanding is important to outline the common, shared goals, which individuals and nations need to work towards; and of which students are an important part. And, *thirdly*, developing student's competencies and capabilities, through the means of educative practices and CE, to achieve the objectives of social development.

These reflections resonate with the ideas shared by Horner (2020: 418), who described the relational interconnectedness of things in a globalized world, where developmental outcomes in one place, is impacted by and shaped through linkages at other places. He, therefore, stated that the failure to view problems from a global relational standpoint, while ghettoizing it into specific locations, is where problems originate (Horner 2020: 424). Embedding this relational interconnectedness into student's learning from a broader perspective, Moran (2018: 150), shared that when the student's representation and perception of their life's aim, comes to be in unison with the sustenance and growth of the common good, it is then that the individual student's life-thread weaves completely into the community tapestry. Further, Mansilla and Jackson (2014: 26) argued that with every major issue having a global dimension, and with people, nations and cultures becoming increasingly inter-dependant; the aspect of students gaining necessary global competencies and capabilities to solve problems, has gained paramount importance.

### *Sub-thematic section 1.1.2: Values undergirding the spirit of CE*

The conceptualization of CE as being underpinned by certain key values also emerged in the ideas shared by the interviewees. Viewing them critically, the values of service,

compassion and responsibility, emerged as broad guiding values of CE, which interlinks with the earlier discussion on the inter-connectedness of the universe and the pursuit of the global common good. The excerpts that follow, illustrate this perspective:

*"Everybody is capable of being of service…and I think that...that the whole community engagement and that sort of ethos...in our university and centers...we try to imbibe...infuse our institutions…our students with" [AL 13]*

*"Service is an attitude where we think of others at the same time as ourselves...so it links to compassion...like if I would have been in his or her place...what my condition would be?...so such value based and compassion driven dedication is needed" [FM 17]*

*"We do it because it's our responsibility...so that is most important part...we are engaging with them, not because they need our help...but because it's our responsibility...so that is the kind of idea that the institution wants to inculcate in the students and also the staff" [AL 5]*

While emphasizing the values of service, compassion and responsibility in a CE process, these excerpts underline two important aspects. *Firstly*, these values guide the embedment of service-based humanism in a CE process, where one engages with the community, not from a mechanical standpoint, but as part of a process which is infused with the spirit of serving and caring for others. And *secondly*, that this service is not given a charity connotation, but is assumed as a responsibility towards community welfare and social development.

This connects well to the discussion in the earlier sub-section; especially the reference to the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which focuses on common human identity, shared one-ness and the need to collectively work towards holistic human development, building on values of kindness, service and social/shared responsibility (Rajah 2019: 11). These values also cohere with the perspectives shared by Letseka (2002, cited in Letseka and Venter 2012: 2), who asserted that Ubuntu encapsulates the moral norms and values like altruism, kindness, compassion, benevolence, care for others, etc. Similarly, Nicolaides and Austin (2022: 191) argued that as social entities, HEI's

need to be inclined to the communities, in a relational and interdependent context and invest in achieving the global common good.

Further, additional value elements like inclusivity, respect and ethics also resonated with the views of many interviewees. They shared as follows:

*"For me...community engagement basically entails...how to be inclusive…how to include...or how to engage with people from the community" [AL 2]*

*"Our overall aim is nothing but serving women...we may have the best ideas...but who knows if its effective or not...right...and then we want to investigate objectively...and respect the opinions, viewpoints of the community…in a valid way...and also ensure that we don't waste time…so again...these things are coming back to ethics...so, we are constantly checking on ourselves" [AL 14]*

*"We allay the fears, apprehensions of the community by settling all questions, confusion and so our work with the communities is premised on transparency, ethics and impartiality" [FM 29]*

Upon deeper exploration, it emerged that while the earlier mentioned values of service, compassion and responsibility served as broad guiding values underlying the CE framework; other values like inclusivity, respect and ethics (while emerging from the broad, guiding values of service, compassion and responsibility), were more rooted in the practical implementation of CE. This inference was based on how the conversation flowed from a broad guiding/philosophical perspective and then zeroed down to the values in terms of CE practice in the field. So, the participants shared that the three values of inclusivity, respect and ethics were the ones which underpinned the CE practices, which started from engaging the community, and continued all through the process, till the end.

These values of the CE process have also been widely referenced in the literature. Bhagwan (2019: 7) outlined some of the key values in the CE process as inclusivity, respect, integrity (which coheres with the aspect of ethics in this context), along with social justice, trust and care. The nine engagement values underpinning successful engagement through partnership (as presented by the Advance Higher Education

framework) also includes authenticity, honesty, inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, trust, courage, plurality and responsibility (Healey and Healey 2019: 7).

### *Sub-thematic section 1.1.3 The broad mandate of social responsibility in higher education*

The interviewees agreed that higher education is entrusted with the responsibility of societal development and welfare, and therefore, it needs to reach out to society and work for its betterment, in order to achieve the objective of social development. Therefore, CE emerged from the broad mandate of social responsibility in higher education. The following excerpts bear testimony to this idea:

"*A university has a social, moral and ethical responsibility towards the society…we are not looking only for degrees...because what is its value, if it doesn't serve the community…also, the institution has to adopt an inclusive outlook...and also work for remote hinterlands...which is called…out of circle...out of square" [AL 1]*

*"What is the sole purpose of education...getting education and giving back to society…we must serve the society...so this consciousness needs to be developed...and this...is not taught by any curriculum...this is by our practice…through what we do on a daily basis" [AL 16]*

*"As part of our social responsibility...every university should share the benefits of their knowledge with the community...it is the demand of time...need of time for the betterment, welfare and development of the community...either rural or urban" [FM 24]*

These excerpts present three main observations. *Firstly,* social responsibility is not only towards nearby communities or those residing in easily accessible areas. HEI's need to take efforts to also reach out to those residing in difficult terrains, for serving remote and marginalized communities. *Secondly*, the development of socially responsible consciousness should be a part of daily practice and ethos of an institution. And, *thirdly*, knowledge produced in HEI's needs to be disseminated and used in a way that it advances social welfare.

Discussions on the social responsibility of universities, as anchors in the process of sustainable societal change and transformation, is replete in the academic literature

(Bokhari 2017: 3; Symaco and Tee 2019: 185; Laszlo *et al.* 2020: 153; Jones *et al.* 2021: 331; Godonoga and Sporn 2023: 445). The increased scrutiny on social responsibility of universities has resulted in the rethinking of the social function of higher education, amidst pressing social challenges (Rababah *et al.* 2021: 4). Godonoga and Sporn (2023: 450) referred to social responsibility of HEI's as 'an umbrella concept, which frames the relationship between higher education and society as part of an organisation's responsibility, service, engagement, mission and impact'. Further, Tshishonga (2022: 902) described HEI's as public institutions, bestowed with social and academic responsibilities that are entrusted with a primary mandate to produce and disseminate knowledge for societal transformation. Hence, the discharging of social responsibilities of HEI's is essential to ensure their continued relevance in a rapidly changing, interconnected and globalized world (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008: 303; Jones *et al.* 2021: 342).

Another set of interviewees positioned CE as an effective means to promote the social responsibility function of HEI's. The following excerpts illustrate this idea:

*"From a community engagement perspective...as a university, we have a responsibility towards the society…so if you talk to registrar or senior officials…you will get to know that our focus is more on change and social responsibility…to develop students or prepare them through engagement…to solve the problems in the society or take up any challenge...so that they can become better citizens...so that is what is any university's social responsibility…and we believe in that" [AL 7]*

*"Community engagement philosophy is rooted in the linkages between education and society; classroom learning and issues faced by communities in real time…that is the starting point...to create a link to go to the community…which then evolves as a part of educative practices in the classroom and beyond...and with the right understanding...slowly a person would grow, relate things to his subject, and can use his knowledge for social good" [AL 9]*

*"Education is for society...if we are not socially relevant…then there is no point in that kind of education…which is…you know...not rooted into the society….so as the head of institution, how I look at community engagement, is that it needs to come in the*

*teaching-learning processes, so that it can be used to foster our broad societal responsibilities of women empowerment" [AL 15]*

These reflections endorse the idea that through CE and its integration into the teaching-learning processes; educative practices can be made more socially relevant by way of connecting classroom learning to real time issues. This in turn prepares the students to be able to solve social challenges, through the medium of academic interventions. This contributes towards assisting HEI's to function in a socially responsible way by; *firstly*, being able to contribute to the process of social development by mobilizing the knowledge produced for public good; and *secondly*, moulding students into global citizens who can anchor the process of social development.

These insights resonate with much of the ideas documented in global academic literature. CE involves a set of activities through which universities can demonstrate its relevance to the wider society, and the CE agenda, therefore, offers a range of possibilities for the universities to function as sites of citizenship thereby, contributing to educational, social and economic well-being of local communities and the nation (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008: 313). Tshishonga (2022: 903) positioned CE as an integral part of university social responsibility and argued that, for universities to effect transformational change within and in their surroundings, CE should be equated to level the teaching and learning functions of HEI's. Therefore, concepts like public engagement or CE cover a wide array of responses to the calls for exercising social responsibility in higher education (Hall and Tandon 2021: 4). Endorsing similar views, many authors have positioned CE as one of the main processes through which universities effect their social responsibilities (Symaco and Tee 2019: 185; Ali *et al.* 2021: 2; Larran and Andrades 2017, cited in O'Brien *et al.* 2022: 817).

**Sub-theme 1.2: Understanding the 'what' of CE: Concepts and their interplay**

Having understood the 'why' of CE (as in the previous sub-theme); this sub-theme now focuses on the 'what' of the CE, in terms of the basic concepts that build the practice. Accordingly, it is divided into the following three sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 1.2.1: 'Community' in CE is subject to diverse interpretations***

As the term itself suggests, CE starts from the word ‘community’, and the entire practice revolves around this concept. This was fully supported by the interviewees, who stressed the importance to identify these ‘communities’, as to ‘who’ constitutes community in CE (Dempsey 2010: 366), before implementing the practice. In this context, three aspects emerged from the interviews, which are discussed in detail as follows:

*Firstly*, most of the interviewees agreed that communities constitute a ‘diverse’ group, as elucidated in the following excerpts:

*“When we initially started...we worked with the rural communities…and so community for us meant rural…but then, there are communities living in urban slums, who have moved from rural areas...and have settled in slums and have no identity… this is also a community…so this changed the notion of community for us…and we started working for such communities in the urban space too” [FM 4]*

*“We work with many communities...we have our local farming community…whom we train and provide assistance in securing sustainable livelihoods...then we are also working with young women in our social enterprises in the urban slum space...to increase their employability and entrepreneurship potential” [AL 1]*

*“For the local community, a number of skilling, entrepreneurship programs are organized…then human rights activities are there; for the national community, we try to reach out to communities far and wide through our Information and Communication Technology centres, for their education, vocation, transformation…and for the global community…we are now preparing to feed 10 million people each day through our ambitious agri-project…so we are counting the entire world population” [FM 28]*

These excerpts shed light on the diverse notions of the word ‘community’, which is not limited to local rural populations, but also extends to urban slum communities, communities in far off locations, national, and global communities. ‘Community’, therefore, differs not only demographically, but also in terms of geography, gender and age. This aspect coheres with the findings of the study conducted by Das and Bisht (2022: 6), who described the term ‘community’, as having ‘fluid’ boundaries. Another interesting aspect which emerges from the excerpts is that the universities focus on

their ‘communities of interest’, changes and expands with time and experience in engagement, and the broad objectives of holistic social development.

So, while ‘community’ constitutes the central focus of CE everywhere (Van Eeden, Eloff and Dippenaar 2021: 2; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 12); the notion of communities varies with individual HEI’s, their perspectives; which in turn guides the nature of their CE practice (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 12). Further, while Osborne, Mayo and Bussey (2021: 6) referred to communities as ‘communities of place, communities of interest, and communities of identity’; Zizka, McGunagle and Clark (2021: 9) argued that communities can include global communities, community partners, and community businesses. However, the unifying aspect among these, is the efforts taken by HEI’s to move out of academic space and engage with diverse stakeholder groups (non-university communities), for achievement of different, but socially relevant objectives (Johnson 2020: 88).

*Secondly*, despite the diverse understandings and interpretations of the term ‘community’; a number of the interviewees felt that the major focus in terms of CE was on the poor, marginalized and deprived communities, who bear the brunt of social inequity and injustice. This is reflected in some of the following excerpts:

“*For us, community engagement is all about reaching out and touching lives of the people at the bottom of the pyramid, particularly the fragile and the deprived sections, including women and differently abled children...and this engagement is built on values of social equity, inclusivity, empowerment and equal opportunities” [AL 1]*

*“In our conception of community engagement, community is not only the immediate, neighbouring communities, but also far flung, marginalized communities at remote locations...that is the idea behind having information and communication technology centres functioning as mini campuses in remote locations, so that quality education opportunities are made available to especially poor populations” [FM 29]*

*“It’s not like we got our degrees and its over…as future Ayurvedic doctors, we need to see how we can help the people, especially those who are ill and suffering in the villages...ones who are not financially sound...or those living in difficult conditions in the villages or those who are abandoned by their families...so we need to build this compassion, sympathy and empathy in these future doctors” [FM 20]*

These excerpts reveal that while the focus on poor and marginalized communities emerges as a common factor; interestingly, this focus is applied in different areas of social development, such as social justice, access to education, and health care. Further, this perspective also links well with the earlier discussion on the 'values' of CE (as discussed in sub-section 1.1.2), such as responsibility, inclusivity and compassion. It can also be said that this focus on the poor and marginalized communities, may also be largely related to the Indian demographical context, which has a fair share of its population (16.4 percent) living below the poverty line mark (United Nations Development Program 2023: 16), which thence shapes up this focus and approach of HEI's.

The above interpretations are reflected in global literature, as a recurring theme in terms of communities. They have focused on a broad range of vulnerable, hard to reach groups, and the ones who are socially disadvantaged or marginalized (and negatively affected by the problem), especially terms of access to minimal resources and opportunities (Van Eeden, Eloff and Dippenaar 2021: 2; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 13; Hurd and Stanton 2022: 882). Further, Dube and Hendricks (2023: 132) reflected on CE as capable of improving public health, social justice and sustainable development, especially in marginalized communities. This was mirrored in the writing by Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy (2022: 114), who portrayed CE as being related to the improvement in the situation of marginalized, poor, segregated, stigmatized and disabled communities.

*Thirdly*, and considering the aforementioned insights, the interviewees called for the need to define the term 'communities', so as to ensure strategic and committed focus in CE interventions. This is reflected in the excerpts that follow:

*"A definition of 'community' is needed first, in order to understand community engagement…it is then that the holistic understanding of the process will come…because, right now…we don't have a definition...this negatively impacts the practices" [FM 23]*

*"When we try to uniformly create these kinds of things for community engagement implementation…what we saying is as if they apply everywhere in a similar manner…they don't; and also, we are not teaching who is the community…we are*

*saying…community engagement is this and this...but, first, define who is a community" [AL 2]*

*"So, in community engagement, there are many stakeholder groups, so I think every faculty...instead of university defining it…it should happen at faculty, department and program, level...for every program…the Head of the Department and faculty should sit together...they should define...as to who is the community for us…and that will help in implementing it" [AL 8]*

While these reflections broadly call for a definition of 'community', before commencing or embarking on a CE initiative; three specific observational threads emerge. *Firstly*, clarity on the term community is intrinsically connected to understanding the deeper dimensions of the CE practice. *Secondly*, as every community is different, and has different requirements; definitive articulation of the concept becomes even more important, before doing CE. And, *finally*, the definition of the community may also be decentralized at the level of departments/faculties, which can contextualize the concept, as per disciplinary dimensions, and embark on the implementation of CE, accordingly.

Positioning these findings in the global literature, MacQueen *et al.* (2001, cited in Cherrington *et al.* 2019: 171) argued about the need for definitional clarity of the term 'community', not only in terms of who participates; but also, why they participate, what they share, what they do, and their connections with each other, which is critical for ensuring successful CE. Defining the term 'community' is the first step towards achieving the broader objectives of CE (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 17). Further, since each community is unique, requiring bespoke and exclusive points of engagement (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 5; Kelly and Given 2023: 13), the importance of defining the term 'community' becomes paramount. Therefore, while the notion of the term 'community' varies with universities perspectives, motivations and target groups (Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 12); it is still important to define the term clearly, because a lack of shared understanding on this, can potentially undermine the process and defeat its purpose (Cherrington *et al.* 2019: 171).

***Sub-thematic section 1.2.2: 'Engagement' in CE involves applying university's knowledge, resources for community development, through varied approaches***

After acquiring an understanding of the term ‘community’, the next aspect that emerged from the interviews was the concept of ‘engagement’ in ‘CE’, in terms of its broad objectives and overarching goals. Here, the reflections from the interviewees, and the associated interpretations can be observed from three dimensions.

As per the *first dimension*, engagement entailed making education useful, by applying the university’s knowledge and resources, to address pressing social challenges and provide solutions to related problems. The following few excerpts elucidate this idea:

*“Community engagement is exploring what exactly is needed for that community, what is the major problem in that community…how we can use technological innovation to provide a solution...how we can academically orient the students, to bring a solution to the problems...and this is because, transformation is the most important part...not the physical innovation” [FM 17]*

*“I understand that community engagement is something whereby which you are translating what is happening in the university...that is the academic interventions and programs and using your theoretical or disciplinary knowledge, to come up with something useful for the community or community partners in the community settings, in being able to provide a solution, address challenges and things like that” [AL 9]*

*“What I understand from community engagement...is that how the implementation area of our education connects with communities...what is the use of our knowledge in the community…or how can my knowledge be of benefit to the communities and provide support for addressing the community problems…all the departments of the university are engaged in such applied research efforts...having a social quotient...so the focus is on application and making the work socially beneficial” [FM 25]*

These excerpts bear testimony to the interviewee’s commitment to making the knowledge useful by applying it in the communities, not only to explore the challenges and problems, but also to provide a solution for the same. This can be done through the application of specific technologies; through regular academic interventions and using theoretical knowledge attained in the classrooms; and through investing in applied and socially relevant research. These findings demonstrate as to how the university can leverage its knowledge and different functions, resources, and infrastructure to develop solutions to social challenges and problems.

Findings from this dimension are rooted in one of the earliest literature pieces on CE, coming from Ernest Boyer, who emphasized that universities need to become vigorous partners in exploring solutions to the most pressing social, economic, civic and moral problems (Boyer 1996: 18). Over the years, this argument has found support in the writings of many CE scholars, who have expressed CE to be an opportunity to utilize university's resources for addressing local community issues, concerns and challenges, for betterment of the community (Furco 2010: 388; Medved and Ursic 2021: 90; Bhagwan, Naidu and Panwar 2022: 10; Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma 2022: 597; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 236). Further, CE can also contribute to developing creative solutions to problems like inequality, poverty, employment for social change (Nkoana and Dichaba 2017: 177; Rahman *et al.* 2019: 11; Gibbs and Poisat 2020: 81; Ohmer *et al.* 2022: 82; Saidi 2023: 4).

As per the *second dimension,* academics viewed engagement as application of university's knowledge and resources for enhancing community empowerment, by building their capacities, and making them self-reliant. This is reflected in some of the following excerpts:

*"Community engagement is never about charity...it is about empowering the communities, kind of revealing to them what they are capable of and helping them realize their own capacities...so that they can leverage their local knowledge, their strengths to achieve their particular goals...and so…in terms of community engagement...it is more of a facilitation role for us" [AL 13]*

*"Community engagement is for enhancing capabilities and giving opportunities to the marginalized section of the society...in terms of education, skill building, healthcare, entrepreneurship opportunities…to people who are not able to get such facilities and ones who are left behind...so providing them that. So, maximum efforts are done for community upliftment" [FM 27]*

*"Under the engagement activities in the school of Agriculture...our main objective is to involve the farmers in all field interventions…understand their problems...and provide them training support in local language (Odia/Telugu), enhance awareness, provide assistance for enhancing profits, diversify agricultural activities...and most importantly…to make them self-reliant in the process, so that they are no longer*

*dependant on external agencies, be it NGOs, or the university or the government" [AL 4]*

On unpacking the above excerpts, three important threads emerge. *Firstly*, in the process of building capacities for community empowerment, the universities play the role of a facilitator or mentor, by enhancing the potential of the communities, rather than treating them as a charity case. *Secondly*, one of the major areas for community empowerment is building their capacities for overall socio-economic development. This involves collective community capacity building and ensuring that no one is left behind. And, *thirdly*, enhancing capacities by providing technical assistance, for making communities independent and self-reliant in the process.

Global literature is replete with arguments which support the aforementioned findings. Preece (2016: 221) elucidated an asset-based approach to community development and CE, focusing on capacity building, for securing a better quality of life for the communities. CE essentially focuses on community capacity building as a long-term goal for developing their agency to enable them to fight against systemic inequities (Hurd and Stanton 2022: 882). Other authors in this context have described CE as offering opportunities to universities, to serve as vehicles of change, enabling communities to realize their full potential (Saidi 2023: 5), transferring skills and knowledge to the community (Dube and Hendricks 2023: 138) and an opportunity to strengthen local capacity for community development, by bolstering local community assets and increasing the functional capacity of communities for engaging in transformative social processes (Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 9).

Therefore, similar to the concept of 'communities'; the notion of 'engagement' in CE too, at times varies across different role players (Dube and Hendricks 2023: 139). The focus on problem solving and community empowerment through capacity building coheres with the broader contextual realities, as observed in developing countries (faced with more immediate development (mainly economic) and capacity building concerns), as compared to developed countries (Symaco and Tee 2019: 187). This is identical to an earlier study conducted by Bernardo, Butcher and Howard (2012: 189), which differentiated between CE approaches adopted in a developing country (as being need based) and in a developed country (as being mission based). Echoing similar thoughts, Hazelkorn (2016, cited in Farnell 2020: 25), wrote about different CE

models (based on the societal objectives to be fulfilled), such as social justice model (addressing social disadvantage in the communities), economic development model (focusing on economic growth and innovation) and public good model (contributing to community development).

Another set of interviewees reflected on the different approaches and terminologies, under which such engagement is being practiced. This is reflected as in the following excerpts:

*"Community engagement can be manifested in different forms…through outreach, service activities...or through applied learning which many departments are practicing...where the students use their knowledge for social welfare…what matters in the end is the outcome and impact" [AL 5]*

*"There is this concept of service-learning...which is both, a method and a pedagogy...basically a form of community engagement, by which students apply their classroom learnings outside, in real life field settings, for achieving both curricular and social development objectives…and the tool we use to do it...we call it social connect...which is a term specifically used by the institution" [FM 12]*

*"Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is one of ways in which community engagement can be done...here, the main idea is that for the local problems…we cannot find out global solutions...not by sitting someplace far away...so if we go to them and find out local solutions in collaboration with them...those solutions will be more helpful for them...so, CBPR intends to understand community's problems, and solve them together…along with the communities" [AL 19]*

These excerpts shed light on the multiple approaches that can be used under the broad framework of CE, which varies with individual HEI's. From the interviews, it emerged that this variation depends on the institutional priorities and established practices, as per the institutional mission and vision. Accordingly, CE can take multiple forms such as service learning, applied learning as practiced by academic departments (as part of the teaching function); Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), (as part of research function); and outreach, other community-based programs/service activities (as part of the service function). Notwithstanding the varied practices, what emerges as a common factor, amongst all of them is that the

HEI's; through its varied academic interventions, engage with the non-academic or external communities to further the dual objectives of academic learning and social development.

These findings from the data cohere with the literature on CE, with regards to varied manifestations of the practice. Here, we observe many scholars referring to CE as a multi-faceted and multidimensional portmanteau concept, involving a vast range of activities and concepts (Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxv; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 13; Vally 2023: 58). Under this umbrella framework, CE can take the form of service-learning (Preece 2016: 216; Dickens *et al.* 2023: 66; Saidi 2023: 4); community-based research/community engaged research/participatory research (De Santis *et al.* 2019: 151; Lee 2020: 1569); volunteerism/outreach/community service (Alexander and Khabanyane 2013: 104; Saidi 2023: 4), etc. Therefore, the form of CE varies with each individual university, and encompasses a range of activities, depending on the institutional interest, culture and priorities (Furco 2010: 381; Rajah 2019: 2; Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 10). However, the basic core of all such varied manifestation is to establish a connection between the university and the community, in a variety of different ways for academically and socially relevant purposes (McIlrath 2014: 40; Johnson 2020: 88; Renwick *et al.* 2020: 1235).

### *Sub-thematic section 1.2.3: Community context and needs determine CE interventions*

This section focuses on the linkages between the concepts of 'community' and 'engagement', as it draws on the interviewee's reflections, which positioned engagement interventions as being determined and driven by the broader community context and local community needs. This aspect was also viewed as an important component in terms of the 'what' of the CE process.

In terms of the *broader community context* as a key determinant of the CE process, some of the interviewee's reflections is elucidated as in the following excerpts:

*"With respect to community engagement projects, every community is different...so if you are trying to solve a water problem in a village in Jharkhand...then you cannot give the same solution in Bihar...because they are culturally different...ethnographically*

*different and geographically different...so the interventions and solutions needs to be contextualized as per the given community and its context" [FM 14]*

*"Our School of Agriculture in Paralakhemundi district…that is a remote area...the department is doing so much good work there with the farmers...it is because of its neighbouring context, which facilitates community engagement…had it been in the city of Bhubaneswar...it would have been irrelevant here...while in Paralakhemundi…the context and community...both are there, which creates the base for community engagement" [FM 1]*

*"If you will go through the demography of India…you will find that there are several tribes…their practices, cultures are vastly different…so similarly their problems, advantages, disadvantages are different…the community philosophy...culture…everything is associated…so it is relative...it is also relative to the person intervening in the area...their thought processes...beliefs…so all these things need to be considered" [FM 2]*

These excerpts reveal three important underlying observations. *Firstly*, different communities at different geographical locations and context, with different cultures ethnography and beliefs call for contextualized CE interventions. *Secondly*, the situatedness of the communities is an important factor, as an intervention may be more relevant at some places, and not at others, considering the local realities. So, this needs to be paid attention to, while devising CE programs. And *thirdly*, in the context of ethnic communities in India, like the tribal communities, CE interventions need to be considerate of their exclusive identities and therefore, needs to be calibrated with care and sensitivity, and CE practitioners need to take special care of this aspect.

These insights are consistent with the global CE literature. For instance, Smith, Else and Crookes (2014: 836) and Ruiz (2014: 46) argued that the nature of CE is both defined and driven by the local context and is also dependant on it. Shawa (2020: 109) and LaDuca *et al.* (2020: 61) added that the notion of CE responds to the local, regional, national context. Therefore, universities and academics are entrusted with the responsibility to leverage CE, depending on the varying contextual realities (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 131). Further, contextual factors like different histories and cultures of different communities, not only characterize CE; but

also play a critical role in determining its eventual impact (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 38). In India, the tribal context in particular, has been documented as being characterized by ethno-centric factors; a thorough understanding of which, is crucial for the success of CE interventions in such areas (Rowkith and Bhagwan 2020: 11; Bhagwan 2022: 1426).

Further, other participants also outlined the aspect of *local community needs* to be another driving factor for CE interventions, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

*"The micro-level at which we are ensuring the engagement...for us, the local needs are the driving factors…for instance, we have the farmers...if there is an insect infestation in some crops...they don't know what to do...how to prevent it…had it been a place like Nebraska or Wyoming…where there is a facility of spraying insecticide through drones/flights...it would be different...but it's not like that over here…here, they need it…so that is why it is a driving factor for us here" [FM 1]*

*"The students have to have an understanding of the problems, right from the grassroot level from where it originates, to be able to find a solution...this also requires a deeper understanding of the local problem...so they should actually start from the grassroot level only…that is… the community where the problem is existing, and identify what are their needs" [FM 5]*

*"Our engagement interventions are not related to the theory or institutional viewpoints...we have identified their problems from amidst the communities in the villages...as to what their needs are…so like for example...digital literacy is one of their needs...it is identified from them only...skill enhancement is their need…so we are not imposing this on them...this is what they want and desire" [FM 27]*

Here, the first participant connects well to the earlier discussion on the role of broader contexts (in developing and developed countries) in shaping up community needs and requirements, which drives CE, and which, therefore needs to be tailored accordingly. The second participant reiterates the need for a deeper understanding of community problems and their needs at the grassroot level for effective CE implementation, and for finding effective solutions. This is especially important in the context of developing countries, where often, development programs result in failure, because of being uninformed by grassroot realities and needs. The third participant shares an important

aspect too, that while CE interventions are driven by community needs, it also needs to be ensured that institutional or individual perspectives do not interfere with the process. This is because, it would risk imposing interventions on communities, resulting in the ineffectiveness of CE programs. Viewed together, all three interview excerpts highlight the role of community needs in driving CE.

This aspect registers its dominating presence in the global CE literature, with many scholars and writers resonating with this argument. CE emerges as a response to address the changing needs of the communities, and therefore, the CE strategy needs to be designed accordingly (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 78; Rahman *et al.* 2019: 12; Snijder *et al.* 2023: 8). Farnell (2020: 51) posited that CE is not only 'supply-driven' by the university, but it depends on 'community-demand'. Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera (2023: 1) added that CE approaches are case specific, enabling specific issues like health and well-being to be addressed. Accordingly, CE is a way in which universities can interact with, address and meet the local needs of the communities (Chandramohan and Bhagwan 2022: 197; Mbhalati *et al.* 2022: 127; Saidi 2023: 4).

**Sub-theme 1.3: Understanding the 'how' of CE: Process and principles**

After understanding the 'why' and 'what' of CE in the previous sub-themes; this sub-theme deals with understanding the 'how' of the process, by focusing on the foundational elements of CE and the CE process which builds on it, as understood from the lens of the participants. Accordingly, this sub-theme has been further divided into four sub-thematic sections, discussed in detail as follows:

***Sub-thematic section 1.3.1: Establishing collaborative partnerships for co-creating knowledge***

Interviews with academics revealed that the process of CE builds on partnerships between the HEI's and the community stakeholders; one which involves co-creating new knowledge together, to achieve the shared goals of social change. They described the establishment of collaborative partnerships with diverse community stakeholders as providing a platform or structure, on which CE activities are based. The following excerpts elucidate this point of view:

*“You need to have a team...so team building is important, because it is not a single person’s job…we need to build a team of academics, community partners and community members...and these relations need to be collaboratory and sustainable...so there needs to continuous engagement, connection with community and partners” [AL 19]*

*“We do the collaboration with community and all the relevant and concerned stakeholders…so ultimately…see, what we are doing for human beings and the society…so their contribution is critical in the process too...and it is not like…that I like something...so I do it...no!” [AL 11]*

*“This whole thing…you should think of it as an ecosystem…where the departments, social enterprises, local governmental agencies, communities and NGOs works in cohesion and unison to facilitate community engagement...as part of academic practices, courses, curriculum delivery and various other activities undertaken” [AL 2]*

The message that emerges strongly from these excerpts, is that CE builds on collaborative and sustainable partnerships with diverse community stakeholders. The social change that CE strives to achieve, requires the interplay of several actors from academia and the community, and for them to function in synergy, to achieve the desired and shared objectives. This also refutes the traditional notion of a top-down approach from academia to a more participatory endeavour where the contribution of each stakeholder is valuable and critical to the outcomes of the process. Further, the interviewee (as in the third excerpt) also equates this to building a kind of ecosystem where multiple actors from academia, community, NGOs and government can come together and work in cohesion, while trying to achieve the social development outcomes, through the academic functions.

Global CE literature also highlighted the importance of collaborative partnerships with diverse stakeholders, such as industry, government, community sectors/actors, community service organizations, civil society, social justice collaboratives, service providers, community based organizations, funders etc. as key to the CE process (Peacock 2012: 1; Escrigas *et al.* 2014: xxxvi; Nkoana and Dichaba 2017: 177; Farner 2019: 147; Hurd and Stanton 2022: 15; Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy 2022: 117; Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma 2022: 609). Emphasizing the importance of broad based

and multi-modal participation in the CE process, Osborne, Mayo and Bussey (2021: 6), wrote that CE plans include the participation of stakeholders of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and culture. Further, Yamamura and Koth (2018: 21) asserted that place-based CE can unite multiple campuses, organizations and stakeholders to pursue shared goals.

Participants further opined that such collaborative partnerships, involves working 'with' stakeholders, rather than 'for' them, which then paves the way for the co-creation of new knowledge(s) for achieving transformative social change. The following excerpts confer with this argument:

*"In community engagement interventions, communities are equal stakeholders and partners in the process, as it involves working together and co-creating knowledge in partnership...and any activity is based on dialogues and also joint identification of issues. In this way, it is different than outreach…as whenever we do community engagement for solving community issues…it is with the help of the communities themselves" [AL 11]*

*"In extension activities…what happens is, I have some expertise and I am going out and delivering it; whereas in community engagement...we are not going as experts, we are going there as partners...we work along with the communities to solve an issue…so that it is more holistic...and this is how I look at it" [FM 8]*

*"There is sharing of knowledge and expertise to and from amongst the university, community members, NGOs, which results in new knowledge…for example, while a technique to plant bananas in the campus was shared by community experts, the same was complemented with academic knowledge to come up with other new innovations in plantation techniques" [FM 29]*

Three main observations emerge from these excerpts. *Firstly*, CE positions community stakeholders as 'equal partners' in the CE process, whose contributions are acknowledged and valued. Accordingly, CE involves dialogic and collaborative engagement between university and community stakeholders, which paves the way for co-creating new knowledge in partnership for attaining social developmental objectives. *Secondly*, the former point differentiates CE from aspects like service or extension in being more participatory, dialogical and reciprocal. This implies breaking

down the elitist barriers which position universities as experts and holders of knowledge. This then makes way for the co-creation of knowledge, together with the community stakeholders, through the amalgamation of the two knowledge systems, which is vital for achieving social change. And *lastly*, CE builds on bidirectional flow of information, expertise and resources between the university and external stakeholders, to further improve upon the existing knowledge systems on both ends, resulting in shared benefits.

Collaborative partnerships for the co-creation of new knowledge, to achieve social change has been adequately referenced in the global CE literature (McIlrath 2014: 40; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 29; Bhagwan 2017b: 179; Nkoana and Dichaba 2017: 181; Preece 2017: 150; Houston and Lange 2018: 47; Shawa 2020: 109). This shifts the narrative of the university as an expert creator and transmitter of knowledge; to a co-creator of knowledge with the community (Chandramohan and Bhagwan 2022: 201). Further, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 62) asserted that such collaborative interactions with the community for discovery and application of knowledge, is what differentiates the concepts of outreach and engagement. Alternatively, Panwar (2020: 40) maintained that such partnerships provide added depth and meaning to traditional concepts of 'service' and 'outreach'. In this context, Reed and Swanson (2022: 3), quoting Roger Rennekamp, wrote that 'while outreach begins with an answer, engagement ends with one'. Therefore, valuing the expertise of people outside academia, and assimilation of local community voices in co-creating new and contextually relevant knowledge systems, is an important component of the CE process (Cherrington *et al.* 2019: 176; Mbah 2019: 19; Medved and Ursic 2021: 80; Nicolaides and Austin 2022: 197). This adds to the argument that knowledge exists both in academic and community settings, and CE facilitates a bidirectional communication and collaboration between the two (rather than a traditional one-way approach) for new knowledge co-creation (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 5; Mutero and Chimbari 2021: 119; Sathorar and Geduld 2021: 90).

### *Sub-thematic section 1.3.2: Principles underlining CE partnerships*

While the previous sub-section explored the role of collaborative partnerships and its functionality in the CE process; this sub-section sheds light on the principles underlining the dynamics of such partnerships. As shared by the participants, some of

such principles are respect, shared authority, and equality, which determines the essence, and also success of such partnerships in achieving the CE agenda. This segment links with, and builds on the discussion of values, embedded in the general CE process (as discussed in sub-section 1.1.2). The following excerpts highlight the importance that the participants placed on the principle of *respect* in community-university partnerships:

*"I think it is giving the community the respect or the understanding that…they are really the ones who hold the knowledge...and in community engagement...we are just trying to facilitate that knowledge...leverage that knowledge for their own benefit...so it values the skills of the community" [AL 13]*

*"Just because I am professor at a university...or a PhD/PG scholar; it does not mean that I alone have all the knowledge...we need to acknowledge and respect the knowledge and wisdom of the communities too...that is the basis of any community collaboration" [FM 24]*

These excerpts emphasize the importance of respecting the practical, traditional knowledge systems of the community, in sustaining community-university partnerships. Further, while the first participant emphasizes the aspect of university as a facilitator in this context; the second participant views respect from the lens of breaking down the elitist domination of academic knowledge, which also links to the discussion in the previous section (which viewed universities as partners in knowledge creation, rather than as sole knowledge creators).

These arguments find resonance with many CE scholars around the world, such as Groulx *et al.* (2021: 275) who wrote about the importance of mutually respectful indigenous-academic partnerships as providing immense benefits to the CE process. The institution's role is seen as to not lead, but act as a learner, supporter and partner (Dostilio 2017, cited in Ohmer *et al.* 2022: 82). Further, while Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan (2019: 8) posited that such relationships are grounded in mutual respect. Rajah (2019: 3) emphasized that respectful attitude towards local indigenous knowledge is a key for substantive transformation, which CE aims for. A few scholars also viewed this aspect from the perspective of humility as the central principle of such partnerships (Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 1), which requires transformation in mindsets,

attitudes, and perceptions in acknowledging and being respectful of community knowledge (Saidi 2023: 5).

The next principle of community-university partnerships, as opined by the participants was that of *equality,* which was viewed from the dual perspective of equality in terms of power relations, and equality in terms of voice. These insights cohere with the interview excerpts that follow:

*"When students go to the field...it is not that they sit in their ivory tower and look down...no…they go there and sit with the communities together on one table and eat, they live with them in their houses...discuss problems and potential solutions...this facilitates equality in our partnerships with the communities and also to a certain extent, neutralizes the power differences" [AL 14]*

*"Community engagement is working with the community in partnerships...where both have equal powers in terms of what is being done" [FM 12]*

*"Community engagement is to work with the community...treating them as equals and as partners, having a good relationship with them, listening to their needs, their wants, letting their speak and develop their own ideas…because they know about their situation better than any of us...they are the experts in their own context" [FM 16]*

These excerpts unpack two important observations. The *first* one relates to the undoing of power differentials in community-university partnerships, which is in sync with the ideas of collaborative partnerships, where every partner has equal power, and therefore, contributes equitably to the process of knowledge creation (as discussed in the previous section). The *second* observation relates to creating an enabling environment, which facilitates voicing of community opinions; thereby strengthening their agency as experts, and positioning them on the same platform as 'academic experts'. This also contributes to neutralizing power differentials in such partnerships.

In view of these insights, several scholars have emphasized the principle of equality in community-university partnerships as important in ensuring sustainable benefits and positive societal impact (Van Eeden, Eloff and Dippenaar 2021: 9; Sathorar and Geduld 2021: 99; September-Brown, Daniels and Hart 2023: 281; Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 1). Further, other authors highlighted that in addition to ensuring community

participation, the key aspect here were, having community voices heard and amplified, which not only strengthens their agency, but shapes the context and direction of CE initiatives (Cherrington *et al.* 2019: 168; Mbah 2019: 16; Renwick *et al.* 2020: 1243). This then, also mitigates the power gaps between the universities and the communities, allowing for unrestricted communication and exchange between the two stakeholders, resulting in the realisation of common developmental outcomes (Mbah 2019: 22). In this context, Machimana *et al.* (2021: 52) added that universities play the role of the facilitator in advancing rural development, through community collaborations.

Further, other participants also accorded importance to the principle of *shared authority and ownership* in such partnerships. The following excerpts elucidate this point of view:

*"Whenever we engage in community partnerships for educational, vocational or other activities, the community is an equal member in the process, and shares authority and ownership...this is the key element…this means that all the activities we perform are with the help of the community...as partners, rather than beneficiaries...so it is doing activities with them...for them…this determines if the aims and objectives of community engagement are fulfilled" [AL 16]*

*"Even when we do collaborative projects with the farmers...we make it a closed loop…with start to finish involvement with the farmers, including mutual sharing of knowledge and information…and focusing on their equal involvement in all phases of activities, so that they share the ownership of the process all through" [AL 4]*

In these excerpts, it is observed that in addition to highlighting the aspect of shared authority and ownership of the process by the community (in addition to them participating as equal partners); the participants also outlined two other significant aspects. *Firstly*, even when a CE program is aimed 'for' community welfare, it is ensured that it is implemented 'with' them, where they have authority and ownership both. And, *secondly*, equality in authority and ownership emerges as a common feature in the entirety of the process, from start to finish. This negates the risk of any disbalance in this aspect at any stage, thereby ensuring that the desired objective comes to fruition.

In a similar vein, many CE scholars have endorsed the aspect of shared ownership in community university partnerships and CE in general (Littlewood and Holt 2018: 555; Mutero and Chimbari 2021: 133). Joint planning and ownership by communities also results in solidification of community-university partnerships (Bhagwan 2018: 45). Further, the principle of shared authority was also identified as an important quality in community-university relationships by the Carnegie Foundation (2019, cited in Hurd and Stanton 2022: 887). This insight was also mirrored in the writing of Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan (2019: 8), who regarded shared authority as one of the grounding principles in community-university partnerships.

### *Sub-thematic section 1.3.3: Co-learning with the community leads to mutuality of benefits*

This section, as part of understanding the 'how' of CE, deals with two intrinsically related aspects under the CE framework. *First*, is the 'co-learning with the community', in light of the rich traditional knowledge systems they possess. The *second* aspect relates to the mutuality of benefits and reciprocal outcomes for both the academic stakeholders and the communities, a significant part of which interrelates with the first point.

Most of the participants supported the argument that communities possess a wealth of knowledge and wisdom, which is a great learning opportunity for the academic stakeholders. So, while CE holistically aims for community development; there are a lot of valuable lessons in the process, for the universities too. The following excerpts, highlight the importance that the interviewees placed on community knowledge, viewing it as a valuable source of learning for academics and students:

*"If you look at agriculture, it has a history of 10,000 years…and say, you are a grad student from a reputed agricultural university...so, within 4 years of study, you have gained theoretical information…do you believe that...this information can compete against a knowledge system standing tall since 10,000 years? No! so we need proper amalgamation of both kind of knowledges…so this is how we are connecting people in our education system…where they are the educators and learners both" [FM 2]*

*"Community engagement explores multiplicity of knowledge...this means that the knowledge I have, is not the sole knowledge…There are many knowledges out*

*there...with which I am not equipped...when you will go out…you will know...so that denotes intelligentsia. So how can we view intelligence on one parameter alone?...so these multiple knowledge systems are a great learning source for those having only academic theoretical knowledge" [FM 25]*

*"What community engagement offers…is when students go to the communities…they are oriented to valuable local knowledge on lifestyles, resilience, folk medicines or local medical remedies…this is hugely beneficial for the students…as they become more knowledgeable, by acquiring such practical learnings from the community" [FM 11]*

These reflections present three significant observational threads. *Firstly,* recognizing, respecting and accepting the strength and wealth of practical knowledge systems, which has stood the test of time and sustained itself, without the help of any 'academic' knowledge; is crucial in a CE process. Considering this, amalgamating it with theoretical/academic knowledge, has the potential to pay huge dividends in the process. This point connects well with earlier discussions on the co-creation of new knowledges (sub-section 1.3.1), as part of community-university collaborative partnerships and that of respecting the communities as experts in their own right (sub-section 1.3.2). This leads to the *second* thread on positioning the universities as 'learners' in the process, contributing to a role reversal of traditional notion of domination and superiority of academic knowledge; considering other valuable multiple epistemologies of knowledge existing in the society. This, in turn leads to the *third* thread, which focuses on the diverse and rich local community knowledge on various aspects of life and living, which can benefit the students on several fronts, beyond the curricular domain. This also forms a type of lifelong education, which students may possibly not receive as part of academic programs in the campus.

Given these insights, several global scholars have emphasized the importance of valuable knowledge residing in community settings, beyond academic campuses, which needs to be recognized and valued (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 10; Bhagwan 2017b: 180; Medved and Ursic 2021: 80). Building on these arguments, Mbah, Johnson and Chipindi (2021: 6) asserted that by legitimizing indigenous knowledge, universities can close the gap between the two knowledge systems (scientific and indigenous), thereby contributing to a faster paced sustainable development (which would have been slow

otherwise). Therefore, in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, where HEI's are no longer seen as primary knowledge producers, and where the local communities possess the knowledge and proficiencies that HEI's can utilize; there is a need for the latter to connect with other knowledge producers and other sources of knowledge (Preece 2016: 226; Nicolaides and Austin 2022: 197). In addition to serving as a context for education (Chandramohan and Bhagwan 2022: 199); communities also offer a context for acquiring education with regards to critical issues of social justice and privilege (Tiessen and Huish 2013, cited in Lee 2020: 1570). In essence, universities intending to a make a difference in the lives of the communities, have much to learn from those very communities (Saidi 2023: 5). Therefore, Rowkith and Bhagwan (2020: 11) positioned CE as marking a shift from a top-down information flow, from the academy to the community to a more reciprocal association where community spaces become learning spaces.

The second aspect in this sub-section relates to the mutuality of benefits and reciprocal outcomes for both the academic stakeholders and the communities, which relates to the benefits derived for all the stakeholders in the process. This includes (but is not limited to), learnings acquired on account of the traditional knowledge systems of the community. Some of the following excerpts share some participant reflections on the learning happening both ways and the mutual benefits derived in the process:

*"From a community engagement perspective… we can learn from the community...as much as the community can learn from us...I think those are important values to hold…so it's definitely a two-way process...kind of give and take...where everyone derives benefits" [AL 13]*

*"In community engagement...when we say reciprocal knowledge...its inclusive of the community...we see community as a potential place for learning...okay…so that experience should feed back into the curriculum...for academic benefit" [FM 7]*

"*In the community engagement programs, which we do with the government for the communities, there are mutual benefits for everyone. While the government gets innovative ideas to further the social development process...student's get an opportunity to work on innovative ideas, as they work with and co-learn with the*

*communities...the society gets innovative solutions to some pressing challenges...while the university gets an opportunity to collaborate with the government, and also fulfil their social responsibilities" [FM 10]*

Another set of important observations emerge from the reflections above. *Firstly*, while the first part of this sub-section focused mainly on the university as learners; the excerpts in this part of the sub-section focuses on the learning which happens both ways, and accordingly, the mutual benefits that accrues for both stakeholders. *Secondly*, in addition to the learning happening both ways, there is also a value emerging from the curricular perspective, as community learnings and field experiences play a role in enriching the curricular learning, by feeding or reflecting back into the curriculum. This is another dimension of the mutuality of benefits and reciprocal outcomes emerging from the CE process. And *thirdly*, in instances where there are multiple stakeholders involved, CE offers mutual benefits for each entity involved in the process, such as students, communities, the university and the government.

These insights resonate with the assertions of many CE scholars and practitioners. While Renwick *et al.* (2020: 1243) wrote about the two-way learnings between academics and communities, as part of the CE process; Du Plooy (2017, cited in Saidi 2023: 4) and Mutero and Chimbari (2021: 117) referred to the reciprocity, bidirectionality and the two-way knowledge exchange between universities and communities, as contributing to the mutuality in the CE process. Further, partnerships based on co-learning or collaborative learning promote and amplify the mutual and reciprocal benefits, and should therefore, replace dated models of the university as an export engine for knowledge and practice (Groulx *et al.* 2021: 276; Medved and Ursic 2021: 80).

Illustrating an example of mutual benefits derived in the CE process, Benneworth *et al.* (2018: 25), wrote that while academics can help to conceptualize and structure a local case; the latter serves to help create new academic knowledge. Mirroring similar ideas, Yamamura and Koth (2018: 42) emphasized the deepening of educational experience of university students, while working on local community development. Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma (2022: 604) added that long term and bidirectional CE partnerships are transformative to the university's core functions as well as

communities' aspirations and expectations. As a result, the benefits accrued, learnings imbibed and impacts felt are mutual and of equal relevance for both stakeholders (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 19). Accordingly, the aspect of mutuality of benefits and reciprocity has been described by several authors as a common feature (Thakrar 2018: 674); key element (Farnell 2020: 34); common foundation (Medved and Ursic 2021: 80) and as a definitive characteristic of the CE process (Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy 2022: 106).

### *Sub-thematic section 1.3.4 Provisioning mechanisms to monitor CE implementation*

The participants opined that the process of CE also includes establishing due monitoring mechanisms for ensuring the smooth implementation of CE projects. As shared by the participants, this was also important to ensure that the CE process complied with its intended objectives and ideals and is implemented in its true spirit. The excerpts that follow reflect some of the participants insights with regards to the importance of monitoring CE practices, both at the design stage and during field interventions:

*"The service-learning practices that we started to implement…I am very clear that I don't want it to dilute to an outreach style at any stage...so that I am very much careful about…so some micro-management and monitoring is needed in the initial stages for faculty members who are new to this domain...as to how the interventions are being designed…how the community is being selected and approached...if the community is the appropriate one for the project…so such monitoring needs to be there...till the whole thing stabilizes on its own" [FM 5]*

*"Monitoring is an important factor in community engagement...not just of the actual intervention...but also of the people who are implementing the practice...to ensure if the program is being implemented the way it was intended…whether the program is following the trajectory for meeting the objectives...if not...brainstorming on what went amiss...what can be learnt and how can the process be improved…so monitoring for me is an aid to learning...it is not about scrutiny or criticism" [AL 13]*

*"Monitoring is an important component of the community engagement process…basically community engagement comprises of 3 phases: ideation,*

*implementation and monitoring...all these phases need equal involvement of the community...so even in the monitoring aspect...it needs to be done with the community…the university cannot be driving it alone" [FM 23]*

While all the above participants argued in favour of monitoring of CE programs; four specific observations emerged from the reflections. *Firstly,* one of the focus areas under the CE framework includes monitoring the work of the faculty members (especially the ones who are new to the CE framework) involved in the design and the coordination of CE programs, by senior CE faculty leaders. This was deemed important not only from the perspective of the smooth passage of CE programs, but also for ensuring if the intended program objectives were being met and due processes followed to achieve the latter. This also reflected in specific concerns raised by experienced CE faculty, regarding the need to ensure that CE is implemented according to its basic ideals and does not dilute into an outreach or extension effort at any point. *Secondly*, the aspect of monitoring was also viewed as a learning process. This presented as an opportunity to take stock of the situation on the ground, learn from the experiences and implement necessary iterations and improvements, which led to better outcomes.

*Thirdly*, similar to the ideals of the CE process, which focuses on 'working with the communities' (as also discussed in section 1.3.1); the monitoring process too, needs to ensure community participation, so that transparency in the process is maintained. This was also important from the perspective of compliance with co-ownership principles, which forms the core of community-university partnerships, on which CE is built. This connects well to the discussion in sub-section 1.3.2, which explored the principle of co-ownership, as part of CE conceptualization. And *finally*, the most significant observation in this context was that, while the data (presented in the form of excerpts in this sub-section), focused on various dimensions of monitoring; what was conspicuous however, was the absence of any form of evaluation, which is note-worthy. This appears to be in consonance with the fact that since India is still in its early stages in the CE journey (as shared by most participants), the focus of most CE scholars remained expressly on monitoring the CE design and implementation process; rather than on evaluating the outcomes, which usually comes after considerable CE experience.

These findings with respect to the monitoring of CE practices coheres with the ideas of many CE scholars. Lee (2020: 1567) posited that the monitoring of CE programs (which is labour intensive and involves continuous institutional assessment) is important for validating its civic authenticity, and ensuring that efforts are not shallow window dressing. Further, Quillinan *et al.* (2018: 123) reiterated that 'ongoing monitoring' was a crucial factor in the success of CE projects, as it provided an opportunity to determine where structures, content and support was needed, or where the existing ones needed to be adjusted. Adding to these arguments, Netshandama (2023: 166) asserted that the monitoring of CE, allowed universities to learn from experiences, reassess priorities, improve service delivery, plan, and allocate resources in a way to keep projects on track. Therefore, monitoring was important from the perspective of tracking and assessing CE, not only to oversee its progress, but also to judge its effectiveness in meeting the desired objectives, and to ensure that it does not become antithetical to the former at any stage (Dube and Hendricks 2023: 145; Hains and Hains 2023: 8; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 238).

Furthermore, Wendling (2023: 229) argued that community partners with whom engaged faculty work, should be considered as equally legitimate reviewers of the CE process, as they can speak more effectively about the CE work of the faculty members. Supporting these ideas, Nkonki-Mandleni (2023: 163) posited that communities be included in the review of CE work by HEI's, as this further deepens and improves engagement strategies. In conclusion, it can be said that such integrated and inclusive monitoring strategies can advance the scholarship of CE, as a tool for transformative knowledge co-production practice (Netshandama 2023: 181).

### 4.3.2 Theme 2: Institutionalizing CE in Indian HEI's

The second theme emerging from the data analysis refers to the institutionalization of CE at Indian HEI's. Considering that India is still new in the CE journey; the interviewees were probed on what they felt was necessary for the successful institutionalization of the practice at their institutions. The responses, which focused on embedding CE as part of institutional culture and structure, was accordingly categorized into two sub-themes respectively, which are explored as follows:

**Sub-theme 2.1: Embedding CE into the institutional culture**

The participants ascribed much importance to embedding CE, into the institutional culture, mindset, and practices, and added that it called for an adoption of a systematic, methodical and meticulous approach aimed at ensuring that CE moves from the periphery to the fundamental core of the institutional beliefs and functions. The various components of such an approach, aimed at the cultural embedment of CE at HEI's, forms the following sub-thematic sections, which are detailed as follows:

***Sub-thematic section 2.1.1: Framing of an overarching institutional policy on CE***

To embed CE as part of the institutional culture; participants voiced their opinion in favour of framing an institutional policy on CE, which could mandate, systematize and guide CE efforts at the institution. However, as observed in most universities; a separate institutional policy on CE was missing, with its core values being immersed in the broader mission and vision of the university. This is reflected in the excerpts that follow:

*"We don't have a separate or a formal policy on community engagement...it is a part of our institutional policy overall...but I think that every institution should develop an exclusive policy on this…as it then guides the action, implementation...and also drives the practice in the long run" [AL 8]*

*"A policy will ensure the integration of systematized community engagement activities at the institutional level...and that concrete things are done in the name of community engagement, rather than superficial activities like cleaning of streets, etc…so a policy needs to be made...which details how it will be dealt with, who will deal with this...about its inclusion in the curriculum...so basically a way needs to be shown...on which we can move forward and work" [AL 19]*

*"At the institutional level, there should be a policy to streamline the activities...what is to be done and at what level...is it at an extension level…or service level...or an engagement level, and by whom…with this kind of clarity and support from the policy, the staff is also encouraged to get involved in community engagement…so a policy provides an encouraging platform...else, it gets all scattered" [FM 19]*

*"Like in the case of National Service Scheme (NSS) at the university…it is a central government's scheme…so there is no administrative barrier in this work, and it is also*

*strongly rooted in the university structure…so policy or administrative mandates are crucial...and at the institutional level, a community engagement policy should be there" [AL 18 ]*

In addition to outlining the importance of a policy that supports CE, the above data unpacks four significant observations. *Firstly*, the infusion of CE values in the larger institutional policy, vision and mission statements in a diffused manner is not enough, from an institutionalization point of view. A clear, separate, and articulate policy on CE needs to be drafted, which will not only guide the action and implementation of CE, but also steer its efforts in a focused manner, over time. This can then also ensure the sustainability of its practice. *Secondly*, having a policy backing for CE ensures that the activities performed under the framework is systematized and streamlined, rather than it being isolated, disorganized efforts. Further, it also gives the efforts a concrete shape, by encouraging curricular integration, thereby making sure that CE is not limited to mere lip-service or superficial outreach activities. *Thirdly*, an articulate policy on CE, with adequate clarity on the activities included under its framework, encourages the faculty members to get involved in the process. In its absence, the efforts remain fragmented and scattered, which also results in dis-incentivization and demotivation of faculty members. And *finally*, illustration of the National Service Scheme (NSS), (a central government scheme), provides a case in example of how a policy can remove the administrative barriers and pave the way for smooth operationalization of activities. This also provides a strong evidence-based support of how the institutionalization of a practice is closely linked to the policy backing it enjoys. This makes a further case for embedding CE into institutional policies.

These insights cohere with the literature on the institutionalization of CE, where scholars have attributed much importance to devising supportive policies that further the CE agenda at the institutional level (Bivens, Haffenden and Hall 2015: 19; Bhagwan 2020: 41; Farnell 2020: 44; Singh *et al.* 2023b: 285). Institutional CE policies also present guidelines for the actioning of engaged scholarship in all its forms (Friedman, Perry and Menendez 2013, cited in Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 238). As such, enabling policies, regulations and norms not only promote or encourage staff to become involved in and support CE (Johnson 2020: 101); but also provide a facilitating and encouraging environment for CE activities, at the campus

(Cho 2017: 191). Further, Kelly and Given (2023: 10) asserted that a reflection of CE in policies ensures that transparent and tangible support can be provided. However, the absence of same can continue to impede the development of CE, as noted in a study conducted by Thakrar (2018: 681).

*(*A best practice model in terms of how an institutional policy, aligned with CE philosophy can contribute to institutionalization of CE, is presented under Theme 4 (best practice models), sub-theme 4.1 and sub-thematic section 4.1.1).*

***Sub-thematic section 2.1.2: Crafting of a detailed and clear strategic plan for CE***

From the interviews, it emerged that while an overarching policy for CE is essential; it is equally important to have a clear strategic plan for CE, with detailed instructional guidelines, which can aid the implementation of policy in practice. The interviewees viewed this perspective from mainly three dimensions, which are explored as follows:

As per the *first dimension*, the interviewees highlighted the importance of crafting a detailed strategic plan for CE; aligned with the institutional vision, mission and core values, and complemented with requisite guidelines which can position CE as one of the functional priorities of an institution. This is elucidated in the excerpts that follow:

*"There is a need to put in place a formal strategy which not only links the institutional vision and mission with community partnership activities…but also conceptualizes community engagement as one of the strategic functions of the university, linked to the institutional mission" [AL 8]*

*"A clear strategy for community engagement is needed, aligned with the vision and mission, and with detailed and clear directives…say, you have established this structure and enabled this particular feature in your policy documents…then there might arise challenges in the form of finances...in terms of getting approvals...in terms of collaborations...or integration across various disciplines…then, how do you overcome this...so that must be taken care of" [FM 13]*

While these participants focused on crafting a strategic plan for CE, aligned with the institutional vision and mission; they reiterated two unique messages. The *first* participant emphasized that in addition to advancing the CE agenda, CE plans should

also conceptualize campus-community partnerships, as a strategic function and priority of the university. This is an important insight which views the strategic CE plans not only as contributing to the institutionalization of CE, but also as focusing on consolidating and strengthening its structural elements, such as campus-community partnerships (discussed in sub-section 1.3.1), on which the CE process thrives. The *second* participant added that such strategic plans should also include directives which can address potential concerns, challenges, or issues that might arise while ensuring compliance with broader CE policies and provide necessary guidance and assistance in this regard.

While earlier CE scholars expressed their support for the inclusion of CE in the official mission statements of the universities (Furco *et al.* 2009: 1; Holland 2009: 92; Kearney 2015: 33); many of the contemporary writers have argued for the crafting of exclusive and strategic CE plans, to aid the institutionalization efforts (Bakar, Sharif and Abdullah 2019: 203; McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 7; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 229; Wendling 2023: 228). Cunningham and Smith (2020: 55) argued for the development of CE plans, connected to the university's strategic plan, which can guide CE efforts across the institution. Building on this argument, Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann (2021: 12) asserted that the inclusion of CE in such plans ensures that it is recognized and codified within the institution. Further, such strategic planning for CE by universities, should not only be aligned with its overall strategy, to provide a comprehensive direction; but should also address critical 'issues, challenges, concerns, and opportunities' in relation to CE (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 65; Huda *et al.* 2018, cited in McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 3).

As per the *second dimension*, another set of interviewees emphasized that such plans provide clear definitions of concepts under the CE framework, which impacts both the process and outcomes. These insights are reflected in the following excerpts:

*"Community engagement strategy comes down to basically how you define the terms...whether it is extension or outreach…it is important to be clear of the intentions and purpose of what it is that you are doing...so in this context, it will be very important to define it properly, and also have an idea of the indicators of the engaged activity you are doing…this is the key to determining the process outcomes" [AL 13]*

*“When planning or strategizing for community engagement, some terminologies should be clearly defined by the institution...because only then it will be possible to chalk out the activities and ensure engagement of various departments...so some notes or pointers which can help them understand and implement the process at their own level should be developed...this helps in the institutionalization process” [FM 21]*

While both the aforementioned participants provide a rationale for the inclusion of definitions of CE related terminologies in the institutional strategic CE plans; two unique observations can be unpacked on deeper exploration. The *first* participant shared that notwithstanding the different terminologies used under the CE framework (which may vary with different institutions, as discussed in sub-section 1.2.2); it is important to provide clear definitions with regards to the same, so that the desired outcomes are achieved. The *second* participant viewed the importance of defining the concepts from the lens of contextual differences in various departments. This would enable the departments to contextualize CE and tailor its implementation, as per the respective academic discipline, for successfully achieving academic and engagement objectives.

This aspect also finds fair support in the CE literature, from earlier authors to their more contemporary counterparts. For instance, while Holland (2009: 92), Fitzgerald *et al.* (2012: 15) and Kearney (2015: 33), outlined the need for providing clear definitions to support the institutional integration of CE; Sdvizhkov *et al.* (2022: 132) and Wendling (2023: 228) stressed on the importance of explicit definitions to be included as part of the CE strategic plans. The provision of definitions is also closely linked to the development of indicators of what constitutes public good oriented CE (Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma 2022: 609). Finally, Saidi and Boti (2023: 85), while arguing for the definition and standardization of terminologies, stated that the reason behind higher education functions of teaching, learning and research having a stronger foothold in the institution is primarily because these terms are properly defined and standardized, and have a common understanding across all stakeholders. Therefore, a similar approach to CE is required.

Finally, the contextualization of CE at the departmental level, gives way to the *third dimension* of the strategic CE plans, as viewed by another set of participants. While agreeing on a broader strategic directive, they argued in favour of the latter allowing

some room for flexibility or autonomy by the faculty member, to tailor the CE practice or courses. These perspectives are outlined in the following excerpts:

*"I think the larger framework should be created by the institution or the administrators...but give the liberty to the teacher, within that framework, to strategize how, when, where and what time, to implement community engagement with the students...so whether the teacher wants them to do a service-learning project, or a standalone project...so, give the academic educator the freedom to practice community engagement" [FM 6]*

*"The strategy for community engagement needs to allow some autonomy to the teachers… it should depend on the course instructor that how much practical hours or classroom hours has to be devoted to a subject…right now...it is fixed, in terms of credits accorded to classroom teaching and practical's…so this structure needs to be more flexible" [FM 12]*

Both the participants above voted in favour of the strategic CE plan, providing room for flexibility in terms of CE implementation. However, the *first participant* talked about strategic CE plans as accommodating and respecting the discretion of faculty members, who should be allowed to take a call on the modalities of CE implementation, while being guided by the overall institutional CE strategy. Further, as per the *second participant*, such strategic CE plans should overcome the limitations of traditional curricular patterns (which follow a rigid structure), in providing autonomy to the CE course instructors, in allowing them to tweak the structure of CE courses. This can aid in the optimal achievement of the learning outcomes of students, as well as the CE objectives.

Strong support for the above reflections in the CE literature comes from the work of Cunningham and Smith (2020: 64), who argued for flexibility to be provided to academic units, while planning for adapting the goals of CE within the disciplinary framework. Separate academic and administrative plans for CE can be provisioned, with both tied to the institutional priorities (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 55). Further, Nicolaides and Austin (2022: 197) and Sormani and Sijde (2023: 10) argued for creative freedom within CE plans, with respect to project formulation and implementation, which could get many projects off the ground, rather than having to

go through burdensome academic administration for little things. In essence, a strategic approach to developing CE is essential to cohesively link the discrete efforts across the institutions, because in its absence; ideas are left to chance, gut feeling or the subjective actions of individuals (McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 7; Tshimangadzo Selina, Mavhungu Abel and Ndwakhulu 2023: 13).

### *Sub-thematic section 2.1.3: Enabling teamwork; combining top-down, bottom-up approaches*

While the above two sub-sections explored aspects related to policies and plans for institutionalizing CE at HEI's; this section focuses on the people involved and the corresponding approaches adopted in the institutionalization process. Both play a fundamental role in guiding the institutionalization efforts to fruition. These insights are based on the participant reflections from the sample HEI's, especially emerging from those institutions who have embarked on the journey of institutionalizing CE or related practices in their core framework.

A fair share of the participants opined that for successful institutionalization, there needs to be collaborative involvement of stakeholders at all levels in the institution, in an active and meaningful way. According to a few participants, having equal stakes in the process, creates a sense of co-ownership, which is necessary to drive the institutionalization process. The following excerpts shed light on such ideas:

*"For institutionalization…support of all stakeholders is important; institution's support; faculty support; student support; and also, community partners support...if we don't have even one of the stakeholder's support…then we lag behind or fail in the institutionalization process...so adopting an inclusive approach and discussing, deliberating with all stakeholders is important and also getting their consent...before we impose something" [FM 7]*

*"You need to create an ecosystem involving all those who will be engaged in the community engagement process and create a definitive plan...this is very important...that the goal should be defined and the concerned people be on-board the idea...this is what I feel" [FM 8]*

*"Institutionalization requires equal contribution from all stakeholders...leadership, faculty, students...because everyone has a role in creating a process and implementing a practice…so acknowledging that...because if not, we keep blaming each other…like community did not respond, or the teacher was on leave, or we did not get permission etc…so we should create a system where everyone can take it forward...because you have to co-create it...it cannot be done in isolation…we have to make it a combined effort" [FM 6]*

These excerpts present important observations, which when unpacked, revealed three important threads. *Firstly*, the institutionalization of CE is a team effort, involving joint and coordinated actions by all concerned stakeholders, such as the institutional leaders, faculty members, students, and the community. As such, relying on a single stakeholder alone, does not serve the purpose in this context. *Secondly*, concerted efforts by all stakeholders here, does not entail passive involvement, but active engagement on the part of everyone involved. Here, all stakeholders participate in constructive discussions and deliberations in the planning process, for identifying common goals. This point builds on arguments in the preceding section, which discussed the importance of autonomy/flexibility to be given to the faculty/departments regarding the implementation of CE, as part of the broader CE strategic plans. And *thirdly*, successful institutionalization requires the respectful acknowledgement of the fact that the process is co-created, where everyone has a stake involved. Adopting such an outlook ensures that the process and the ideas are co-owned, thereby minimizing the instances of unnecessary deflection of tasks and responsibilities to others.

Several CE scholars have mirrored these insights in their writings on the institutionalization of CE. Collaboration and cooperation between different levels and individuals in the organization, including top leadership, middle level leadership, professoriate, faculty members, students and community, has been documented to be of vital importance, in institutionalizing CE at a university (Bender 2008: 92; Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 204; Bakar, Sharif and Abdullah 2019: 203; Johnson 2020: 99; Mbah, Johnson and Chipindi 2021: 6; Sdvizhkov *et al.* 2022: 132; Tshishonga 2022: 902; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 236; Kelly and Given 2023: 11). Further, in addition to the involvement of all stakeholders, scholars have also argued

for their active engagement in the process; translating the idea into CE plans and then its implementation (Cunningham and Smith 2020: 64); engaging in active conversations and discussions on advancing the CE agenda (Batten *et al.* 2017: 32); and playing an instrumental role in developing community partnerships (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11). Finally, for successful institutionalization, while Hains and Hains (2023: 10) argued that CE should be a shared responsibility of all stakeholders; Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan (2019: 30) highlighted the importance of developing models for shared leadership within universities, to advance priorities.

Building on the above, the next set of participants highlighted the need to have a fine balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches for the institutionalization of CE. This is elucidated in the excerpts that follow:

*"Community engagement emerges as a team effort, including planners/administrators, faculties and also students…so the top-down directives from the management, need to meet bottom-up initiatives coming from the faculties, departments…it is then that you say that you are headed towards institutionalization" [AL 8]*

*"The bottom-up approach is also important because initiatives need to come from within too…a top-down push is not sustainable in the long run...also, only bottom-up approach, without leadership commitment remains fragmented and isolated...so both approaches are needed…specially in terms of institutionalization of a practice" [AL 3]*

*"Here, all energies are synergised together…starting from the top leadership...to the deaneries…academic departments…to the faculty, researcher's, research centres, and students…so for community engagement...it is as much top down as bottom up…kind of coming together of both approaches...and this is how we are able to do the activities effortlessly and meaningfully" [AL 14]*

While all the aforementioned participants called for a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to institutionalization; deeper scrutiny reveals three significant insights. *Firstly*, the reason behind a combination of approaches being crucial for the institutionalization of CE is that since CE is a team effort (carried out in a participatory mode); no singular approach can lead to successful institutionalization. While mere top-down effort will not sustain in the long run; mere bottom-up approaches run the risk of isolation and fragmentation. So, both the approaches need to function in unison,

for ensuring successful institutionalization. *Secondly*, this combination involves the passing down of the larger vision from the leadership to the faculty; and concerted efforts by the latter to meet that vision. And, *thirdly*, combination of such approaches, apart from aiding the institutionalization process, also results in collateral benefits in the form of smooth, meaningful, and more efficient CE practice.

Aligned with these insights, Farnell (2020: 51) posited that the adoption of only top-down and centralized approaches to institutionalization is unlikely to result in widespread acceptance of CE by academics. On the other hand, bottom-up approaches tend to dilute over time, in the absence of support from the senior management (Kempton 2019, cited in McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 14). Therefore, September-Brown, Daniels and Hart (2023: 271) argued that an ideal institutionalization approach, transpires at all levels in the university, with the leadership driving and supporting the process from the top, while also receiving requisite support from the faculty who adopt CE as part of their teaching-learning, research processes. Mirroring similar ideas, Constantinou (2020: 6) added that while top-down instruction on CE can advocate for change; the actual implementation is steered by the stakeholders at the bottom. In line with these arguments, Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan (2019: 17) alerted the scholarly community to the reality that no single intervention is adequate to create an institutionalized environment, and as a result, multiple actions in multiple areas need to be attended to, simultaneously.

### *Sub-thematic section 2.1.4 Linking CE with academic learning, within regular curriculum*

While the preceding sub-sections explored the institutionalization of CE, through policies, strategic plans and approaches; this sub-section focuses its attention on more practical implementation aspects. Here, the participants opined that true institutionalization of CE is possible only when it is linked to students' academic learning, positioned within the institutional functions of teaching, research and service, and is not seen as an 'add-on' component.

The following few excerpts shed light on the pronounced importance, participants placed on linking CE with academic learning of students, as an important step towards institutionalizing the practice in the higher education framework:

*"Community engagement should not be a piecemeal approach or a welfare activity...that you go outside...do some engagement and the next day you come back and forget about it…as you are not bringing it to classroom...now, how we do it…we focus on solving problems under community engagement...but we also don't want to dilute the standard of academic rigor which is required for a student...so we blend community interactions with academic learning, as part of core curricular programs…this is our vision for institutionalization" [AL 8]*

*"You have to integrate the aspects of academic learning and community engagement…it is only then that you can achieve the objectives...so the importance of both aspects...teaching-learning and engagement is amplified when amalgamated…so, if we can integrate both, then the result that will emerge, will be of huge benefit for the society...that will be then, true institutionalization" [AL 18]*

*"It is important to not lose focus on the alignment of community engagement and academics...because we are academic institution, not a charity-based entity…so as an academic institution, coming back and seeing whether what we did was useful…meaningful engagement actually reflects back on what you have learnt from the process" [FM 6]*

When viewed together, these excerpts unpack few important and deeper issues in this context. *Firstly*, linking CE with academic learning is one of the ways in which it can be transformed from a 'siloed activity/piecemeal approach', or a 'short time welfare activity', into an integral practice contributing towards furthering student programmatic or learning outcomes, while maintaining academic rigor. This, therefore, also helps in placing CE at the core of the academic framework. *Secondly*, integrating CE experiences and academic learning results in their mutual reinforcement and the achievement of both objectives (engagement and academic). This is particularly important, considering that both are valuable and can thereby ensure both academic excellence and social relevance. And *thirdly*, using reflections emerging from CE experiences to aid and enrich academic learning, ensures that CE becomes strongly rooted in the university functions, which is an important aspect from the institutionalization perspective.

Among the earliest proponents of these arguments, was Dr Ernest Boyer himself, who while promulgating the term 'scholarship of engagement', argued for establishing close linkages between academic and civic cultures (Boyer 1996: 33). He asserted that the two should communicate continuously and creatively for serving each other's objectives (Boyer 1996: 33). Therefore, CE is not an add-on activity, to normal academic work, but core to the academic discipline and its identities (Kruss 2012: 19; Johnson 2020: 103); and should be practiced in the context of knowledge exchange (Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 128). As such, authentic institutionalization of CE is tied to the deeper understanding that it remains indivisible from the academic objectives of teaching, learning, research (Bhagwan 2020: 44; Farnell 2020: 44; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 9). In fact, institutionalization is enhanced when CE is connected to academic learning outcomes (Holland 2009: 94).

Furthermore, few participants went on to suggest that such integration of CE with academic learning can be achieved by mapping curricular domains with the engagement activities. The excerpts that follow outline some of these ideas:

*"I think that in learning outcomes...when faculty members are designing their courses...they have to map it...that how are they going to deliver this course through community engagement...this is the starting point…so the embedment has to come from the design...so every teacher has to define as to how it should be a part of the course delivery, without deviating from their learning goals…so that the students, while they learn, they also engage with the community" [AL 8]*

*"Linking community engagement and academic learning can be done through mapping...to see what percentage of the syllabus aligns directly with community engagement...and also to explore that what are the learning outcomes which can be aligned with community engagement...so this is how existing syllabus can be connected with community engagement objectives...this is very important if you are looking at institutionalization" [FM 23]*

*"We map our engagement with the subject…say the engagement involves 10 steps...so I will start from step number 1, step number 2, step number 3....so in step number 1...what learning or academic knowledge I am using…I will map it there...then,*

*step 2 what academic knowledge I am using...I will map it there...so this way, the engagement is completely integrated in the teaching-learning processes" [FM 5]*

Two important observations emerge here. *Firstly*, attempts to link CE with academic learning can begin right at the curriculum design stage. Here, it can be explored as to how CE can be made a part of the academic delivery mechanism, and how it can contribute towards attaining the learning goals of the academic program. *Secondly*, the other way to achieve such linkages can be mapping the existing courses from the lens of CE. This can be done to take stock of both its current integration, as to what is already being done; and explore other potential opportunities for such embedment to further strengthen this integration. Alternatively, engagement can be linked to the disciplinary learning objectives. Either way, mapping of engagement activities with academic knowledge provides an interesting and innovative way in which the embedment of CE across academic functions can be achieved. This not only provides clarity on how the engagement and academic goals coalesce; but also, how the two contribute to each other, in better achieving their individual outcomes. This can in turn, significantly contribute towards the institutionalization of CE.

Support for such approaches to institutionalizing CE emerges in the work of Batten *et al.* (2017: 41), who asserted that mapping curricular programs is a powerful catalyst for institutionalizing CE at university campuses, which can be undertaken with limited resources, but can also have maximum impact. Further, mapping of CE programs with the curricular/co-curricular activities on the campus will not only further strengthen CE programs, but also develop new approaches for civic engagement and social responsibility (Batten *et al.* 2017: 1). Doing so, it can provide a means to the university to integrate CE activities into the syllabus of the existing subjects being taught at the university, or design a new curriculum, certificate, or degree course to that effect (Panwar 2020: 47).

Finally, another set of participants viewed the allotment of due academic credits to programs which linked CE and academic learning, as the ultimate validation of CE embedment into the academic core functions, which was also an important indicator for its institutionalization. Inclusion of the same as a criterion for graduation emerged as an added advantage. This is elucidated in the following excerpts:

*“While every university tries to serve the society in its own way, but on a broader sense, these things remain as an add-on component to regular academics...but, the effectiveness with which we want this to happen…does not come from an add-on perspective...therefore, we have built our curriculum structure such that we can make all this, as part of academic interventions...relating it with courses and the credits that students earn...which is important for graduation…so, for us, it is integrated into our curricular credit structure...this is an important part of institutionalization” [AL 9]*

*“There should be some weightages for that… so what we feel is that it should be part of our academics...like core subjects…and credits need to be given...which will also be counted in their final marksheet/grades…and if it is a part of academic curriculum or it is counted somewhere or there are some incentives...then people will work...otherwise nobody will take it seriously” [AL 11]*

*“Like in one of the South Asian universities I visited...each and every student has to have service-learning credits to graduate…now that is how you institutionalize a practice…it reflects in how important it is to achieve your academic requirements...it should not be that you publicize that you do community engagement…but in reality, only a small fraction of students actually do it” [AL 5]*

Three significant observations emerge from these excerpts. *Firstly*, effective institutionalization of CE is intertwined with how the latter reflects in the academic credits earned by the student or the weightage it is accorded, from the perspective of graduation requirements of the students. Unless these conditions are fulfilled, the goal of institutionalization of CE remains far-fetched. *Secondly*, such credits and weightage then warrant the seriousness and accordance of value to CE, by the academic stakeholders. This is because, any practice which is only decorative and does mere lip-service, is likely to be dismissed, both by faculty members and the students and may also demotivate them from engaging. And *lastly*, and most importantly, the depth of institutionalization of CE at an institution is not determined by whether it is ‘alive’ and ‘being practiced’ at the institution; but by the percentage of students engaged in CE as a mandatory part of their learning and graduation requirements. Here, while a low percentage, most likely indicates the use of CE as a publicity exercise, rather than being approached from the viewpoint of a meaningful activity; a high percentage is a true indicator of its effective institutionalization.

Exploring the global literature within the context of these findings, Hok Ka Ma and Tandon (2014: 200), argued in favour of the allotment of academic credits for student's participation in CE. This can be achieved through modifications in the marking scheme of the existing courses, and which can also partially meet their graduation requirements (Schukoske and Adlakha 2012: 229; Furco 2014: 264; Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 200). An example of such an award of academic credits to students and the accounting of same in staff appraisal was narrated by Shahabudin (2017: 303), as he documented the CE experience at the National University of Malaysia. Finally, Holland (2009: 94) argued that the percentage of students or faculty actively involved in CE, or related courses could be the simplest and most straightforward indicator of institutionalization.

### *Sub-thematic section 2.1.5: Embedding CE across different academic disciplines*

This section explores the institutionalization of CE, from the perspective of its embedment across various academic disciplines, and how these academic departments, function in synergy with each other. The participants viewed this arrangement as a major enabler towards institutionalizing CE, along with facilitating its meaningful implementation. The emergent perspectives in this context, are discussed from three different standpoints.

Considering the *first standpoint,* some of the participants shared the concern that despite progress being made in integrating CE in various academic functions, it continues to be limited to social sciences (even in some of the best practice universities). They, therefore, called for a wider embedment of CE across other disciplines. The following excerpts confer to these ideas:

*"Right now, only few departments are engaged in community engagement...like anthropology is there, social development, sociology...but this is not enough…you cannot aspire for institutionalization in such a scenario...community engagement integration needs to be across all departments…it needs to be worked out with them" [FM 23]*

*"I believe that not only social work...even other departments need to embrace community engagement...because there are many important courses running in the*

*university, who can be roped in and they can play an important part...like there is this geography department, who can work with farmers...political science can engage on aspects of local rural politics or women's participation in it…and so on" [FM 19]*

These excerpts highlight two important aspects. *Firstly*, if true institutionalization is to be achieved, CE needs to spread across all university departments and disciplines, and not be viewed as the prerogative of social sciences alone. Being boxed into specific disciplines only adds to seclusion of the practice, acting in contravention to the institutionalization objective. *Secondly*, all disciplines can play a role in CE, as per their own disciplinary context, thereby improving the outcomes of the CE process as a whole and situating it as a central thread in the university framework. This also contributes towards the institutionalization of CE.

From the *second standpoint,* another set of participants shared that even where there was evidence of community work being done in different disciplines, the work was often found to be isolated and fragmented. They, therefore, called for more inter-disciplinary efforts, between different departments. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

*"Many things are being done, but mostly it is isolated, fragmented...it should come in as an integrated form...in the form of inter-disciplinary practices or research...which can reduce disciplinary rigidities...then, some say that we do community based research...but the participatory or the engagement aspect is missing...in such cases, community engagement scholars like us, can share learnings on engaged practices... and work can be done together...so inter-disciplinary work can facilitate this" [FM 25]*

*"At some places, some good work is being done...but they may not have the right orientation. Here, to bridge the gap and develop a common understanding; the institution can facilitate opportunities for different departments undertaking an integrated effort for any particular project...this may bring all efforts together and exchange of knowledge, information can be there...in this regard, a study regarding the bagru printing is being done...where different departments are involved...like chemistry, engineering, social sciences…so it's a start" [FM 13]*

These excerpts highlight some significant insights. These are: *firstly*, even where some CE related activities are being done, they remain mostly isolated and fragmented, due

to rigid disciplinary barriers in institutions. This is viewed as a major institutionalization challenge, by the participants. *Secondly*, it also emerged that most of these efforts, are incorrectly perceived to be CE, due to the lack of orientation. This results in diminished impact and unfulfilled objectives. It is for this reason that collaborative, inter-disciplinary efforts assume pronounced importance, as it paves the way for sharing of lessons, ideas, and the correct orientation (especially by CE scholars). As a result, objectives can be achieved with impact, through collaboration and cooperation. The participants viewed this arrangement as an important effort towards the institutionalization of CE.

Finally, from the *third standpoint*, other participants viewed interdisciplinarity as a win-win prerogative; not only with regards to the institutionalization of CE, but also its effective implementation. This is elucidated within the following few excerpts:

*"Inter-disciplinary, engaged research should happen...because then, there are options of sharing knowledge, resources, skills and a big pool is available from which resources can be used" [AL 19]*

*"Schools have to work together, in coordination and alignment…as community engagement is an interdisciplinary and also a team effort...involving multi-stakeholder engagement…you need all kinds of expertise and skill sets and resources…this has been our experience of working with the communities…so having just one department to go and do this...it doesn't really make sense" [FM 14]*

These excerpts provide a logical rationale for inter-disciplinary efforts for the implementation of CE, as they allow for sharing of ideas, skills, resources, expertise and skill sets from different domains and disciplines. This is also important, considering that CE necessitates different kinds of expertise, which various departments can offer, through their theoretical proficiencies. This not only facilitates CE in the field, but also represents unified institutional efforts towards implementing the practice. This can then greatly further the cause of institutionalization of CE at institutions.

These findings are consistent with the arguments proposed by many CE scholars in the global literature. In as early as 2012, Fitzgerald *et al.* (2012: 17) emphasized that the institutional alignment of CE demands inter-disciplinary cooperation and rejection

of disciplinary turfism. Furco (2014: 265) found interdisciplinary research as an important component for advancing the institutionalization of CE, among others. Further, through a study aimed at understanding institutionalization of CE in South African HEI's, Bhagwan (2020: 43) found that, for advancing the institutionalization of CE, it needed to be interweaved across all disciplines, as opposed to it being the sporadic efforts of a few academics or departments. Mirroring similar thoughts, Panwar (2020: 47) wrote about the need for CE to be embedded across different disciplines like electronics, management, economics and political science, who can use their knowledge and expertise to further CE outcomes, and not be limited to social sciences alone.

Further, institutional support for such internal collaboration not only streamlines the process for further CE and student learning outcomes (Shah, Preston and Dimova 2023: 14); but such synergised alignment and a campus wide organization was also important to avoid any conflict among departments (Murrah-Hanson and Sandmann 2021: 11). This results in the added advantage of sharing of knowledge and resources between disciplines to further the cause of CE and humanitarian development (Tshimangadzo Selina, Mavhungu Abel and Ndwakhulu 2023: 12). This is also important in light of the transdisciplinary nature of community problems and considerable university and discipline wide resources that the university can bring to the table, for addressing them (Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan 2019: 29). This is also one of the major strengths of CE (Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan 2019: 29).

**Sub-theme 2.2 Embedding CE into the institutional structure**

While the preceding sub-theme focused on embedding CE as part of institutional culture; this sub-theme, builds on the insights shared by participants and focuses on the development of supportive systems and infrastructure, to embed CE into the institutional structure. As per the participants, this structural embedment of CE requires multiple efforts at the institutional level, which has been presented in the form of the following six sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 2.2.1 Developing common understanding and competencies for CE***

From the interviews, it emerged that the first and foremost requirement for building a supportive system and facilitative environment for CE, which can also contribute towards its institutionalization, was the provision of training for faculty members and students. Several related aspects in this regard are explored as follows:

The first aspect that participants highlighted was the lack of orientation and understanding amongst faculty members regarding CE, owing to their different disciplinary backgrounds. This called for the provisioning of specialist training on this topic. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

*"We have people from different backgrounds, who may not have an orientation to community engagement or may have different approach or understanding…so there is a need to first bind the unequal energies of people from different sectors or areas...so these differences need to be eased out first...for this, proper training is needed to put them together...to work in one direction of community development" [AL 3]*

*"At present, most people are not aware of community engagement...so their focus and priorities are different...so right now, if you have an interaction with many people and ask them what is community engagement...then they will not be able to tell, because either we have not focused in that direction or they have not been told...many reasons can be there" [FM 24]*

*"I think very few teachers understand the value of service learning or community engagement...may be because they have not grown up with that background…not their fault...so common training should be there for everyone...from there, the interest comes...then you can invest in targeted capacity building for the people who want to sign up…I think this is the strategy that the institution should develop…to make the concept known to everyone and then create the demand for more specialized training" [FM 6]*

These excerpts outline two significant perspectives. *Firstly*, faculties in the higher education framework come from different disciplinary backgrounds and often lack an orientation to CE, resulting in differing focus and priorities. Therefore, an orientation cum training is needed, to bind these energies, ease out the differences and train them in CE. *Secondly,* it is to be noted that despite providing the orientation and

understanding, it is a reality that not every faculty will be inclined to embrace the practice. Therefore, institutions can also strategize in a way that, while common orientation is provided to all; specialized training is given to faculties who show interest. Such an approach can ensure that institutionalization efforts are targeted and realistic, rather than striving for full compliance, at least in the initial stages.

Exploring global literature in this light, Nicolaides and Austin (2022: 197) argued that we should not assume that academics are aware of CE, but rather provide suitable training for the effective pursuit of quality CE. Further, Welch (2016: 188) asserted that while faculty members are experts in their fields, most of them have little or no experience or knowledge of CE or engaged scholarship. Therefore, one of the primary ways to engage and motivate them for this complex work is, ongoing technical support and professional development, which can also result in effective engaged teaching and scholarship (Welch 2016: 188). Further, Hains *et al.* (2021, cited in Hains and Hains 2023: 9) acknowledged that such training can be complex, as the difference in disciplinary training can heavily influence the philosophies and epistemologies of staff towards CE. However, notwithstanding the complexity, university based professional development of faculty through orientation or refresher training programs, focused on interdisciplinary perspectives, is necessary not only to achieve meaningful CE, but also encourage faculty to think of innovative ways of implementing CE (Panwar 2020: 48; Hains and Hains 2023: 9).

Furthermore, in addition to the training requirements of faculties with little or no experience of CE; the participants also noted that there is a general capacity building requirement for all faculty members, even for the ones already engaged in some form of CE. This is because most of the times, they either lack deeper understanding or the competencies or skills sets needed for CE. This is reflected in the excerpts that follow:

*“Capacity building training or technical know-how of the practice is important because many faculties, even though they are inclined to do community engagement and may be also doing some community-based activities…but they don’t understand it properly…they take it as synonymous to the general approach of social outreach...or don’t have the necessary skill set or competency...so capacity building at the institute level is a must” [FM 13]*

*"Institutionalization comes with one understanding...so all faculties need to be inducted to this concept…so such induction training is required for those new to the area and those already doing some certain things…this is important, so that everyone approaches the practice with one understanding, one vision...and also to gain clarity of purpose on the common goals" [FM 8]*

*"It is true that a very small fraction of students or even faculty is willing to engage in community engagement…so firstly, the most important requirement is to provide the proper orientation to all faculties with respect to CE...and how it connects to the institutional vision and mission…this will help in the internalization of the concept...along with development of a common understanding" [AL 2]*

These excerpts highlight three significant observations. *Firstly*, inclusion of CE in policies and strategies is not enough, and needs to be supported with requisite capacity building of faculties to build knowledge, competency and required skill sets. This is especially important, since most faculties lack the desired orientation and skill in this context. *Secondly*, institutionalization of a practice is determined by having a common understanding of the same and also a shared vision with respect to the goals to be achieved. Specialized trainings at the institutional level can help achieve this objective. This is important, considering the fact that different faculties have different understanding of the concept, as also noted previously. And *thirdly*, proper training and orientation, in addition to developing the core understanding of the concepts, should also provide clarity on how CE is aligned with the institutional vision, strategies and priorities. This, then also addresses the challenges of disinterest and lack of motivation in the faculties to pursue CE as part of their daily activities.

These aspects relating to the need of capacity building of staff in general, for implementing CE have been repeatedly emphasized by CE scholars over the years (Lazarus *et al.* 2008: 70; Holland 2009: 92; Schukoske and Adlakha 2012: 229; Kearney 2015: 37; O'Meara and Jaeger 2016: 144; Tandon *et al.* 2016: 31). Referring to the South African context, Shawa (2020: 111) argued for a common induction program to be included at all universities, for providing conceptual clarity on CE to increase their knowledge on the same, and develop the required dispositions needed to implement it. This is important because, it has been seen that academic staff often report a lack of confidence in the skills and techniques needed for CE, which highlights

the need for training in community-based education, for developing the skills and sensitivity to be able to address community concerns (Klein et al. 2011, cited in Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 12; Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 8). Further, such trainings will not only increase the faculty's value and appreciation for CE (McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 8), but also provide conceptual clarity on definitions and create a shared vision, which is an important strategy for scaling up the institutionalization of CE (Snijder *et al.* 2023: 6).

Another set of participants also highlighted the need for training the students who are the actual 'conductors' of community partnerships (Sponsler and Hartley 2013, cited in Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11) and executors of the CE plans (Bakar, Sharif and Abdullah 2019: 203). Some of their reflections are presented in the following excerpts:

*"Many of our students come without an understanding of the community or community engagement...so we need to train them and equip them...and tell that this is what you will be doing…so it takes a lot of effort, from the educator…so, before having students do the exercise in the field is…letting them know the underlying philosophies…what to expect, the challenges they may face, how to cope with them…so this preparation...mental and academic...both is needed" [FM 6]*

*"We also train and prepare our students before they go to the field...so that they have all the skill sets needed to work with the community and are motivated also…so you see that everything is done intentionally, and we are very much driven by ethics" [AL 14]*

*"The student cannot make an effective contribution unless and until they have a good understanding of the community and also community engagement…as this also involves working on sensitive topics, dealing with challenges, establishing rapport and relationships with communities…so students need to be trained in all these things" [AL 19]*

These excerpts highlight two important perspectives. *Firstly*, students coming into the higher education framework, often do not have a prior understanding of the concepts, community, or CE. Considering this reality, specialized training is needed to develop their understanding on these concepts, not only from the academic point of view, but also for training them for fieldwork. This includes the development of skills sets for

establishing relationships, facing challenges, coping with them, working on sensitive issues, complying with ethics, etc. Accordingly, students need both academic and mental preparation on these fronts. *Secondly*, such an understanding is important to ensure not only their active and enthusiastic participation in the interventions, but also sustaining their interest and motivation over a period of time. The participants, therefore, reported this to be an important component of the institutionalization of CE, in addition to the training and orientation of faculty members.

Several CE scholars have presented similar ideas in the global literature. For instance, Miller *et al.* (2019: 30) emphasized the importance of student preparation and engagement, considering that they come with different levels of academic preparation and community experience, and therefore, must be provided with a clear understanding of CE and the requisite skills for carrying out the former. Adding to these arguments, Osborne, Mayo and Bussey (2021: 6) argued in favour of providing students with access to a suite of CE training, resources, community of practice networks and relationship management tools to develop the necessary skills and capacity to carry out CE. Austin and McDaniels (2006, cited in O'Meara and Jaeger 2016: 144) wrote about creating similar programs for training doctoral students in methods of applied research or participatory action research, such as community need assessment or asset mapping. Similarly, Sathorar and Geduld (2021: 101) asserted the need for CE principles to be explained and demonstrated to student researchers, by way of short-term learning programs or workshops.

### *Sub-thematic section 2.2.2: Establishing centralized, institutionally visible CE structures*

The second aspect which emerged as a popular sentiment among the participants, towards building a supportive ecosystem; was the establishment of a university-wide structure for coordination and management of CE activities. This was noted by the participants, to be both a contributor towards and an indicator of true institutionalization of CE at an institution. This is reflected in the following excerpts:

*“There has to be a centre of excellence for this...kind of a centralized structure that should doing be coordinating it...instead of doing it in a decentralized way...which fizzles out with time…such structures can then help mobilize funds and resources for*

*various community engagement activities and programs, channelled through the university" [FM 4]*

*"Universities need to establish a central hub for coordination of institution-wide CE activities...it can take a lead in establishing community partnerships, conduct training programs, and so on" [AL 12]*

*"There should be a community engagement cell...which can further the information about community engagement in the university…at present, we do not have any centre or cell as such and as a result, people don't know…so all institutions should have a community engagement centre...which can also assist in developing community aligned curriculum and offer training opportunities" [FM 11]*

*(*A best practice model with respect to the successful establishment of such a CE structure in a university, and its associated roles and functions is described in detail in Theme 4 (on best practices), sub-theme 4.1 and sub-thematic section 4.1.2).*

These excerpts unravel two important observations. *Firstly*, the importance of constituting a CE coordinating structure at the university level, for overseeing and managing CE activities, is uncontested. This includes aspects of internal management, such as embedding CE into academic programs, conducting trainings; and, external management, such as fostering partnerships with communities, NGOs, etc. *Secondly*, this arrangement can contribute significantly, to the cause of institutionalizing CE, by positioning it amidst the institutional infrastructure and as one of the institutional priorities. Further, such a structure can also play a critical role in popularizing the practice of CE, by exploring and advertising potential engagement opportunities and ensuring easy access and mobilization of funds and resources needed for CE activities.

The constitution of special units or centres or structure, ones which are centrally placed in the organizational structure; for coordinating and facilitating CE and fostering partnerships with communities and external agencies has been well documented in the literature (Weerts and Sandmann 2008: 90; Holland 2009: 89; Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 204; Bakar, Sharif and Abdullah 2019: 203; Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11; Bhagwan 2020: 47; Farnell 2020: 44; Ohmer *et al.* 2022: 83). In addition to playing the coordinating function, these centres can also make academic stakeholders aware of

CE opportunities, and work with faculty members for inclusion of CE in the institutional curriculum (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11; Snijder *et al.* 2023: 8); provide training opportunities, as well as manage the logistics of the CE process (Batten *et al.* 2017: 36). Accordingly, the absence of such structures was associated with a discouragement of dialogues on CE, and also its abandonment in due course (Kearney 2015: 32; Sheila *et al.* 2021: 6).

In this context, it is imperative to take note of an interesting development that has emerged at Indian HEI's. Participants at few universities shared about the establishment of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) hubs, which are attached to individual departments (driven under a partnership arrangement between the university and the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility at Higher Education) at their respective universities. While such hubs were constituted with the mandate to coordinate engagement activities at the university; however, participant interviews revealed that these hubs are facing several limitations at the institutional level, as elucidated in the following excerpts:

*"While our hub...hosted by economics department, is doing authentic community engagement…but the visibility is low...then, there are also parallel structures at the institutional level, like 'social connect', which oversees the generalized engagement…and as it is rooted in the structure of the university, it enjoys a larger support base. So, what is happening is that the generalized efforts, undertaken by individuals with no idea of community engagement, is a common feature at the university…and on the other hand, the actual community engagement activities happening and undertaken by trained personnel under the hub remain skewed…if these two can come together, lessons can be shared, and meaningful work can be done" [FM 12]*

*"Our hub...under the Centre for Women's Studies…still does not have the status of an institutional centre...like the other research centres we have…which have an institutional status…because of this, we are facing a severe resource crunch…so if it can get the recognition as a centre, then systematizing and institutionalizing activities will be much easier…we can then get more funds, staff recruitments...and accordingly their capacity building can be done" [FM 25]*

*“At present, the visibility of the hub is low at the institutional level...so proper plans for strengthening the hub and diversifying its activities need to be in place, and it should be in agreement with the leadership” [AL 11]*

In addition to the above, the Indian experiences in terms of CE structures also threw up an array of diverse perspectives, as reflected by academics at different universities. One such perspectives is captured in the following excerpt, where the participant reflected on the impact of an institutional structure fizzling out over time:

*“Mostly all the community engagement activities are steered through the Centre for Society University Interface and Research (CSUIR), affiliated with the faculty of social sciences; however, the centre could not produce the desired result after tenure of Dr X, who passionately created and led the centre. However, we are now trying to revive the efforts, under the current Vice-Chancellor who is supporting us” [FM 18]*

Another participant expressed their concern with respect to the numerous structures for social development, crowding the institutional space, which may result in the desired objectives being lost in competition. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

*“Already a lot of institutional frameworks is existing…we have so many centres who are engaged in efforts towards community development…there is the centre for governance…centre for innovators and entrepreneurs…and like that…the problem with newer centres is that it adds to confusion and competition...so that needs to be taken care of” [AL 2]*

However, in contrast, another participant at a different university recounted how the different structures at the university functioned in sync, to achieve the common goals of CE. The advantages which accrued, is reflected in the excerpt that follows:

*“In addition to the platform of UNESCO Chair on Women Empowerment, hosted by Ammachi Labs...we have the research Centre for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality and Ammachi Labs…we then have our parent charitable organization Mata Amritanandmayi Math, which has adopted 101 villages across India...which gives us access to diverse communities for doing community work....so zooming into this...we have this well-connected infrastructure…so the support system is very rich” [AL 14]*

*(*The above practice, referring to the synergistic functioning of structures is presented in more detail as a best practice model, under Theme 4 (on best practices) and sub-theme 4.1 and sub-thematic section 4.1.3)*

While the first part of this sub-section argued in favour of the creation of specialized CE structures for managing CE activities; several participants (as illustrated in the excerpts), shed light on the caution that needs to be exercised in the establishment of such structures, so as to ensure its impactful functioning. Five main lessons emerge in this regard. *Firstly*, it needs to be ensured that the structure constituted has a centralized or institutional status, or is on par with other recognized institutional structures. Such an arrangement not only ensures easy access to resources, but also good visibility at the institutional level. *Secondly*, there needs to be some arrangement to bring alignment between new CE structures and existing older structures (for social outreach; or ones who are already doing some form of community work). This should be done in a way that their efforts can be synergized towards achieving better outcomes in terms of CE; rather than them being in competition, which complicates the process.

*Thirdly*, in such cases, affiliation of such structures with singular departments/centres contributes to the isolation or low visibility of efforts, as they remain being boxed, skewed, or limited. This results in diminished impact of both the structure and its activities, over time. This necessitates the need for such structures to be centralized and institution wide. *Fourthly*, in addition to establishing CE structures, its sustainability plans also needs to be put in place, to ensure its continued and impactful functioning, unaffected by changes in leadership, programmatic focus, etc. In essence, the efforts steering the structure should be institutional, rather than individual. And *finally*, to achieve optimum results, efforts should be taken to synergize the functioning of various institutional centres (for engagement, research, social outreach), in a way that they complement each other, resulting in the achievement of the shared institutional vision with respect to CE and overall social development.

While these insights emerged in the context of Indian HEI's; most of the findings cohere with the writings appearing in global CE literature. For example, Furco (2014: 264) noted that such centres need to be legitimized by institutional power structures, for gaining credibility, respect and validity in the institution. This necessitates the

integration of such centres directly into the administrative structure of the institution (Friedman, Perry and Menendez 2013, cited in Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 238). Further, Cunningham and Smith (2020: 55) asserted that having a centralized office to coordinate CE work across the institution is an important indicator that the work is a university-wide effort, and not a movement or interest of a particular department or individual. Also, CE and its centres, to emerge as central aspects, need to align with existing university structures and functions (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2016: 247); in order to be widely supported by key stakeholders, so that the focus remains unchanged despite changes in institutional leadership, funding and focus (Furco 2014: 264). Adding to this, Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan (2019: 19), identified interfacing of CE infrastructure with other engagement units on campus as an essential dimensional component of institutionalizing CE.

### *Sub-thematic section 2.2.3 Recruiting trained staff under the ambit of CE structures*

Having explored the dimensions related to the establishment of CE structures, as a step towards institutionalizing CE in the preceding section; the next step, as opined by the study participants was the recruitment of trained, experienced, and passionate staff, as part of the CE structures. Such staff, envisaged to form a core team, are seen as important for steering CE efforts across the institution. Accordingly, the participants shared various nuances regarding the rationale behind recruiting dedicated staff for managing CE activities, as part of these CE structures. Several of such reflections are captured in the excerpts that follow:

*"In community engagement...the most important thing is establishing connections with the community...so you need a dedicated team to do that…but that really is not always present…so institutionalization of community engagement includes this aspect of having a dedicated staff who can look after the operational requirements to carry out the process smoothly" [AL 3]*

*"A hardworking and passionate team is needed to lead the community engagement efforts...as the process has specific requirements...so a team is needed, which is trained and ready to take on responsibilities with the right motive…that is very*

*important…because if you try to simply pull it without taking any effort...it will not sustain" [FM 23]*

Another set of participants also narrated the challenge of having few or no faculty members as CE staff, to lead CE efforts, as reflected in the following excerpts:

*"We also face the challenge that we don't have any permanent staff as part of our community engagement centre…they are mostly faculty members who are recruited on an ad-hoc basis, based on their knowledge and experience…and then, they are given an honorarium…so this is a challenge" [FM 18]*

*"We also need to build on the manpower, as the work expands…at present...we are only four of us, the trained mentors under the hub who are driving it…so what can be expected from such few people...so for this, an in-house training could be done...by the already trained mentors…that was our lacunae…this could be done to expand the team" [FM 11]*

However, in an HEI where a formal CE structure was established and staff recruited; a participant recounted its advantages as in the following excerpt:

*"So, we have dedicated staff…if you look at the team members of the Centre for Service Learning…faculty members are from different campuses and departments...so it is easy to monitor and guide the activities in the respective campuses...the work is also easier and coordinated…otherwise it would have been difficult" [FM 5]*

Exploring all the above insights with respect to staff recruitment under the CE structures; reveals three significant observations. *Firstly*, CE involves a complex and difficult process of fostering community-university partnerships, one which requires specific expertise, dedicated commitment, and sustained effort. This necessitates the recruitment of permanent or tenured staff under the CE structures, ones who are passionate, trained, experienced and capable of steering the operational aspects of CE. Ad-hoc recruitment in such cases impacts both the outcome and the sustainability of interventions. *Secondly*, as CE work expands across the institution, there is also a need to proportionately and judiciously increase staffing to be able to match the workload and duly carry out associated responsibilities. *Thirdly*, diverse representation

among such staff, in terms of disciplines and campuses (in case of multi-campus universities) further aids the operationalization, implementation and institutionalization of CE.

These insights find resonance in the global CE literature, in as early as in the pivotal work of Weerts and Sandmann (2008: 97), who viewed professional CE staff as critical 'boundary spanners', who play an important role in determining the institutional pathways to engagement, in addition to facilitative leadership and organizational structures. These professionals not only build legitimacy for CE practices, but also negotiate tensions in community-university partnership relations (Maxwell and Benneworth 2018, cited in Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 40). Further, Batten *et al.* (2017: 1) emphasized the importance of nurturing faculty members who can model CE pedagogy, and also promote CE on campus and in the community, and engage in public scholarship. Considering these, McGeough, Leitch and McGeough (2022: 10) advocated for the recruitment of appropriate and dedicated staff through a formal recruitment system, involving self-selection, recruitment drive and/or a profiling system.

Further, many participants also noted that in addition to recruiting staff for undertaking various CE related functions, under the ambit of CE structures; equally important was provisioning time in their academic schedules. This meant easing their academic workload, in a way which enables them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and meaningfully. Lack of the same was highlighted as a major barrier and demotivator for faculty members pursuing such roles. This is evident as in the following excerpts:

*"Teachers are reeling under and entangled in administrative and academic workloads, especially the junior professors…that needs to be relieved...and they need to be given time in their academic schedule...so that work can be done…if this is not provided, community engagement will suffer" [FM 23]*

*"What is happening right now...the major hurdle that we are facing is the limited university hours in which a lot of things need to be done…so having a time designated for community engagement work will help in its implementation and motivate people to do the activities…else it becomes a challenge to balance things" [FM 8]*

Two specific insights emerge from these excerpts. *Firstly*, merely recruiting staff and assigning them responsibilities is not enough to ensure the successful implementation of CE at universities. Considering that such staff most often have other academic and administrative responsibilities (to be completed within the limited university hours), there should be concerted efforts towards curtailing the latter, so that they can make themselves available for overseeing the CE work. And *secondly*, this was also important to ensure that the staff do not get overwhelmed and burdened and that their motivation, interest, and passion are sustained, which is an important aspect from the institutionalization point of view.

These insights resonate with the writings of several authors. Kelly and Given (2023: 8) noted that because many academics work long hours, investment in CE may become burdensome. As a result, they are forced to make difficult choices while balancing teaching, research, service, and the broader demands of academia (Harris 2021: 615; Kelly and Given 2023: 8). In line with this, Houston and Lange (2018: 56) suggested the option of limiting class sizes for faculty engaged in community work. Nevertheless, the most important aspect here is to view CE work, as part of the 'academic identities' of such staff engaged with CE structures (Weerts and Sandmann 2008: 98). Finally, Reed and Swanson (2022: 3) asserted that university-wide, engagement-oriented units, grounded in diverse talent pools and motivated enough to pursue CE activities, can create an institutional capacity for the provision of reciprocal, engaged and rich experiences for teaching and research functions of the institution.

***Sub-thematic section 2.2.4: Incentivizing CE for faculty members and students***

Continuing the discussions in the preceding section, the participants noted that within the context of the competing demands emerging from the traditional teaching and research roles; it was important to institute rewards for such work. They opined that this would incentivize both faculty members and students, who invest their time, energy, and resources to work under the CE dimension. This was considered as important, both from an institutionalization standpoint and most importantly, for encouraging and motivating the faculty and students to pursue this work with passion.

The excerpts that follow highlight some of the participants insights, with regards to the need for rewards and recognition, for CE within the institutional framework:

*“An environment is needed where the faculty are motivated to be self-engaged and self-driven...they should not do it because someone has told them to do so …rather they should do it...because they wanted it...and for this, motivation is important...rewards and incentives play an important part in motivating the people...especially when such rewards are equal to academic achievements, like journal publications...this will create the importance” [FM 4]*

*“Incentivization is specially needed for people who are new to this…or are not naturally tuned in, due to different backgrounds...so, for that we have to incentivize and create role models…reward the people doing good work…so that is how you create role models for others...at present, there is no reward as such for the faculty…so conferment of some awards or recognition at the institutional level, may incentivize teachers to engage in this work” [FM 6]*

*“Who will encourage or motivate the students? It is the teacher...and who will make a case for the teachers? So, our institute will make that…so the institute should incentivize the teachers, who will then promote the students…it is then that the movement will move forward with desired momentum” [FM 24]*

These excerpts note the absence of rewards and recognitions for CE based work, and therefore, recommend constituting the same at the university level. On unpacking this broad observation, several significant underlying ones also emerge. They are: *firstly,* rewards and incentives have an important role to play in motivating faculty members to pursue CE, so that it becomes a self-driven effort, rather than being driven by external factors (which makes it unsustainable). However, it is equally important to ensure that such rewards are placed on par with other traditional academic accomplishments, which the faculty members normally strive for. This is an important observation for ensuring that such rewards are not limited to ornamental value, but hold high utility in terms of the professional growth of faculty members. *Secondly*, this is especially important for faculty new to the CE framework. Recognizing and rewarding faculties for their CE based work, not only accords value to the practice, but also serves to create institutional role models, who can further inspire and motivate their peers and colleagues, especially the ones new to the framework. And *finally*, the encouragement of faculty members is also important from the perspective that they

are the ones who steer and channel the students into this area of work. As a result, incentivizing and motivating them assumes even more importance.

These findings resonate with much of the body of work available within global CE literature. Rewards and recognition for the exemplars of engaged academic interventions, are viewed as important for incentivizing and encouraging faculty members, especially the new ones, to get involved in CE based scholarship (Weerts and Sandmann 2008: 91; Holland 2009: 93; Fitzgerald *et al.* 2012: 15; McIlrath 2014: 43; Kearney 2015: 33; Farnell 2020: 44; Shah, Preston and Dimova 2023: 13). Such academic reward structures must be designed in ways that support the faculty who choose to leverage their expertise, resources and time for CE (Wendling 2023: 221). Bhagwan (2020: 50) added that the recognition of engaged scholarly work of faculty, by way of rewards, also enables those being recognized, to serve as role models for others who are considering it. However, Smith, Else and Crookes (2014: 845) noted that such recognitions and rewards should be on par with its traditional teaching and research parallels for championing an effective engagement agenda at the institution. Such a reward structure also raises the visibility of CE (Johnson 2020: 100); creates a strong culture of CE within the university (Harris 2021: 616); and also promotes its integration into the institutional culture and practice (Dickens *et al.* 2023: 68).

In addition to rewards and recognition, some participants also made special mention of the inclusion of CE work as a criterion in performance assessments and promotions, as another significant way of incentivizing faculty members to engage in this field. The following excerpts highlight such reflections:

*"Universities often define performance appraisal through research publications...so accordingly, that is what the faculty focuses on…so for effective institutionalization, community engagement also needs to be accounted in performance appraisal systems...to incentivize the faculty and popularize the practice" [AL 8]*

*"Social connect...which is general community outreach, is well practiced here, since it has a weightage in the performance management system for faculties and is also included in key performance indicators for departments...however, there is no such thing in place for community engagement...so its implementation remains weak" [FM]*

*“In our performance appraisal...there are some marks given for social outreach...so I don’t know...how much…1 or 2 points may be…so we have a self-appraisal form...but no mention of community engagement is there...it should be made a part of such appraisals” [FM 12]*

Two significant insights emerge from the above excerpts. *Firstly,* weak implementation of CE is directly linked to its non-inclusion in the criteria used as indicators for assessing the performance of faculty members, for promotion purposes. Therefore, more practical terms of rewards and recognition for CE includes expansion of the ambit of performance appraisals to include community engaged work as a valuable criterion for the former. This will also ensure that faculties engage in CE as a regular practice. *Secondly*, this aspect assumes profound importance in view of faculty focusing more on generic extension activities as these are included as performance assessment criteria. Accordingly, replacing it with CE will result in meaningful outcomes, both in terms of CE and also, motivating people to get engaged in the same. These observations are also important, considering that it is natural for faculties to seek professional growth, even though they may be engaging in CE out of passion. In this context, linking CE with professional promotions and career growth, makes it a win-win proposition for faculty members.

These insights cohere with the scholarly work of many international CE experts, who have advocated for the inclusion of CE into the appraisals, promotion and tenure criteria for faculty members engaging in such work (Driscoll 2009: 10; Houston and Lange 2018: 55; Bakar, Sharif and Abdullah 2019: 204; Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11; Saltmarsh, Middleton and Quan 2019: 19). While Denny (2018: 16) accorded this to increasing the value of CE scholarship at the institutional level; Kelly and Given (2023: 8) found that expanding promotion to acknowledge CE activities was critical for faculty members and researchers to embrace this work alongside other workload demands. Such advantages would then also result in opening multiple opportunities for faculty members, both professionally and personally (Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 8). Finally, Sdvizhkov *et al.* (2022: 129) asserted that the inclusion of CE into such criteria is not only an important starting point for those wishing to champion the cause, but is also important to uphold the socially conscious raison d’etre of universities.

Lastly, another section of participants noted that along with faculty members, it is also important to provision incentives or rewards for the students too, as they are critical anchors of the CE process. The is elucidated in the excerpts that follow:

*"Like in National Service Scheme (NSS), certificates amounting to 2-3% weightage or bonus marks are provided...so that shows in the enthusiasm that students have for NSS activities…similar incentives should be provisioned for community engagement activities also...say some fellowships or community engagement scholarships...it is very important for incentivizing the students" [FM 24]*

*"Honestly speaking…the students' need to be given an incentive…in the sense...you give them a certificate or certification of some kind...which is useful for their jobs...see today, the education system plays to the market...so students will only opt for something which gives some professional or career benefits...this will sustain their interest and motivation...or else, they are not interested" [FM 23]*

Two main observations emerge from these excerpts. *Firstly*, much like the faculty members, the students too are driven by incentives available for CE work. While academic credits can be considered as one form of incentive (as discussed in sub-section 2.1.4); another form of the same, can be the provision of CE fellowships or scholarships for the students, which can attract them towards pursuing CE related courses or activities. *Secondly*, considering the reality that the competitive job market drives students' choices in contemporary times; unless and until CE provides the students with a clear professional advantage in terms of career benefits, they are unlikely or reluctant to opt for it. To address this aspect, students may be provided with professional certifications for their engagement in CE work, which can both attract and motivate them to engage in CE.

These insights too, have been supported by a fair number of CE scholars. Rewards and recognition of their engagement in CE is important for incentivizing and motivating students to pursue engaged activities (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11; McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 7). Bhatnagar *et al.* (2020: 9) found that the award of grades and certifications encourage student participation in CE and related activities. Batten *et al.* (2017: 36), through institutional case studies, documented the provisioning of a wide array of student fellowships for promoting and facilitating student engagement. Similar

recommendations emerged from an India-based study conducted by UNESCO Chair in CBRSR (2015a: 18), which proposed CE scholarships as a means to incentivize students towards CE. Similarly, service scholarships can also integrate academics with service, thereby motivating students towards undertaking engaged academic activities (Long 2002, cited in Hutson *et al.* 2019: 12).

### *Sub-thematic section 2.2.5: Provisioning administrative support for CE implementation*

Under the framework of providing the requisite ecosystem and infrastructure; the importance of capacity building; CE structures; and passionate and motivated staff was explored as in the preceding sections. The participants further opined that such structures and staff further require committed and continued institutional support to ease the process of the implementation of CE. This was also important to situate CE on par with other institutional priorities, which is another step towards institutionalization. The participants viewed such support mainly from the dimension of funding and general administrative assistance for aiding the CE process.

Dedicated financial allocations for CE was seen by the participants as one of the most important institutional supports, as highlighted in the following excerpts:

*"Everything comes down to funding...it is essential for supporting community engagement or Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) field work; training personnel; establishing partnerships; conducting projects; sharing of findings; capacity building, etc... also in CBPR, we have to build rapport with the community first...so we have to go and stay in the community...necessary arrangements are needed for that...this is an important factor where we need financial support" [FM 25]*

*"There needs to be separate budget allocation for supporting community engagement or Community Based Participatory Research projects and case studies...which can be easily accessed by faculty members, with limited paperwork...this is also important for sustained interventions in the community" [FM 12]*

Two specific observations emerge from exploring the finer nuances of these excerpts. *Firstly*, the diverse kind of activities under the CE framework demands exclusive financial allocations for enabling its easy implementation. This was essential not only

for ongoing interventions, but also for ensuring continuity and momentum of the same in the future too. *Secondly*, while financial support is necessary, it also needs to be ensured that access to finances be hassle-free and involve minimum bureaucratic processes and paperwork. Such assistance within a facilitative environment was not only seen as an enabler of institutionalization, but also as one of its true indicators.

Among the earliest scholars on CE, Bender (2008: 92) argued that dedicated funding is important not only for sustaining the practice of CE, but also signals a shift from symbolism to substantive and visible support for CE at the institutional level. This is an important aspect for institutionalizing the practice (Bender 2008: 92). Several other authors have similarly highlighted the importance of an internal base funding for CE, as a strong indicator for its institutionalization, and positioning CE as a mainstream activity (Furco *et al.* 2009: 5; Holland 2009: 90; Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 204; Jackson 2014: 54; Mtawa, Fongwa and Wangenge-Ouma 2016: 130; Farnell 2020: 44). Further, in a stakeholder perception analysis study, Sheila *et al.* (2021: 4) found that financial support was recognized as a need for effecting CE, both by faculties and students. Manifested as 'monetary funds' needed to undertake CE projects (Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 7); such budget allocations can be channelled through the establishment of campus endowment (Hutson *et al.* 2019: 11) for providing CE a more central space in the institutional framework (Friedman, Perry and Menendez 2013, cited in Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 238).

Further, another set of participants called for general administrative support in terms of CE related activities, as outlined in the following excerpts:

*"There are other administrative factors involved...for example, say, we want to collaborate with social organizations, and we want to bring them into the university framework for collaborative work...but that is not easy….as here, we are following a very systematic and rigid structure for these things...which is not very facilitative...so this constrains the efforts...so such administrative challenges are there" [FM 21]*

*"Students should be granted easy approvals and permissions for community engagement field work...also, when they go out to collect the data, they should be given some support, in terms of conveyance and transportation thing...just as conveyance facility, buses are provided for social connect and other outreach*

*activities...similar facilities should be made available for supporting community engagement or Community Based Participatory Research, too" [FM 12]*

Similar to the insights on funding; these excerpts outline two important aspects. *Firstly*, the institution should have an enabling environment towards officialising community university partnerships. A restrictive or rigid approach in this regard, constrains CE implementation, while also negatively impacting the institutionalization process. And *secondly*, as CE involves considerable work with the communities in the field, the students should be granted easy approvals for the same. Further, provision of logistic support or transportation assistance emerged as an added advantage. However, as noted by the participant, this will only be possible when CE is recognized to be on par with other institutionally designated activities for outreach.

These findings cohere with global CE literature. Sibhensana and Maistry (2023: 199) highlighted the role of institutional support, not only in identifying suitable community partners, but also building and nurturing such community-university partnerships. Jansen (2010, cited in Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 9), while referring to community partnerships, pointed out that, as the latter involves developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU); it is important that the procedures, involving paperwork and ethics clearance be moderated, so that carrying it out with the communities becomes easier. Further, CE or community-based education requires necessary support, ranging from transport, materials, enabling access to communities in the target area, etc., which is primarily an institution's responsibility (Schukoske and Adlakha 2012: 230; Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 7). Making available adequate facilities in terms of infrastructure and logistics, is both an enabler of CE and also a requirement for consolidating and strengthening its institutionalization process (Panwar 2020: 48; Das and Bisht 2022: 8).

### *Sub-thematic section 2.2.6: Creation of platforms for knowledge sharing on CE processes*

This sub-section can be considered as an extension of the preceding sub-section, as it focuses on the creation of knowledge sharing platforms by institutions for enabling learning of shared lessons on CE by peers and colleagues. Participants from most

universities highlighted this aspect as being essential for building the momentum for CE at universities, and shared several recommendations in this regard.

The following excerpts reflect the emphasis participants placed on the creation of platforms for enabling knowledge sharing on CE, and different modalities for the same:

*"An effort could be conducting workshops on an open platform for sharing knowledge/ information on community engagement and related practices...not only within the university, but should be open to other universities from other regions as well…where collective information sharing can be done...and lessons be learnt from best practice universities…this will be very useful for community engagement implementation" [FM 13]*

*"Another approach at knowledge sharing which we have tried within the institution is that since social connect, which is general community outreach is mandatory, so everyone does it…so the faculty like us who are trained in community engagement...when we go for social connect...we try to make the practices more community engaged…and as a result, the ideas of community engagement are shared with the students and the accompanying faculty members, and how it differs from social connect...and we have seen that this has sparked the interest of faculties in community engagement" [FM 12]*

*"Collaboration is very important...the problem is we don't collaborate...we create islands of excellence and we are happy with it…this will not work...say, if there is a unique initiative that a university has undertaken...then it should look for ways to associate with or involve other like-minded universities too...like if one institution has one particular strength…others may have specific other strengths...so they can join forces to learn from each other and better implement an engaged practice...so this is one thing...which I feel we should do...but we don't do it" [FM 4]*

*"We should also explore international collaborations…like there are international Community Based Participatory Research hubs, doing great work in different parts of the world…so we can network with them and establish exchange programs...under which the scholars or faculty can travel to different countries to share their experiences…this will result in new lessons and insights emerging...but unless*

*institutionalization of community engagement is done through proper channels...implementing these things will be difficult" [FM 24]*

*"To ensure that our models and lessons from community engagement are available to everyone far and wide, where they can replicate it in their own context…we have been publishing our work…so that people read it and can adopt these approaches...it's good for them...it's good for the collective community" [FM 14]*

Viewed together, these excerpts reveal important observations, not only from the perspective of the institutionalization of CE, but also popularizing the practice in the broader context. This assumes special importance in the Indian case, where CE is in its infancy stage, and the movement is still gathering momentum. In particular, three observations can be outlined. *Firstly*, platforms and mechanisms for knowledge sharing is seen as important for deepening and strengthening the practice of CE at institutions, which is an important aspect of institutionalization. This is enabled by learning from the best practices and experiences of others working in the field and using the same to improve CE implementation at respective universities.

*Secondly*, in addition to formal platforms like workshops; knowledge sharing on CE can also be facilitated by internal initiatives at the institutional level, national efforts, and through international collaborations. Internal initiatives entail in-house knowledge sharing by trained CE faculty to others, when engaged in other institutional collaborative exercises. National approaches to knowledge sharing can involve seeking active collaborations and involving like-minded universities, in path breaking CE interventions that any best practice university may be undertaking. This is important to negate the culture of creation of islands of CE excellence regionally, towards building collective consciousness for engaged excellence at the national level. Further, international endeavours in this regard includes exploring networking opportunities to seek information and learn from international colleagues and counterparts. While such platforms and initiatives contribute to the institutionalization of CE, it also works the other way round, as in, without institutionalization, establishing such mechanisms or platforms may be a difficult task. And *thirdly*, publications emerging from engaged scholarship-based activities can also play a vital role in knowledge sharing and dissemination of best practices. Such an approach also

contributes towards opening access to knowledge systems, thereby contributing towards the knowledge democracy movement.

Much emphasis has been attributed to the aspects of knowledge sharing on CE by various authors in the literature. Nongxa (2010, cited in Saidi and Boti 2023: 85) asserted that, for as long as CE remains a nebulous term; expecting it to achieve the same level of significance as attached to traditional academic functions remains a difficult proposition. Therefore, there is a need to demystify engagement practices, through extensive knowledge sharing, through platforms such as workshops or conferences that enable active engagement with the terminology and its implementation practices (UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 18; Saidi and Boti 2023: 85). Such communicatory approaches can strengthen CE, by building awareness on the same, and bringing engagement scholars together on one platform (Bhagwan 2020: 46; Sheila *et al.* 2021: 4). Such communication platforms, by showcasing best practices to others, internally and externally, can increase the visibility, value, and appreciation of CE across institutions (McGeough, Leitch and McGeough 2022: 8).

Further, Hains and Hains (2023: 9) argued for a more collaborative effort across institutions for sharing best practices in CE and other engaged activities. On the other hand, Tshimangadzo Selina, Mavhungu Abel and Ndwakhulu (2023: 13) called on model best practice universities to join hands with others, to uplift each other to greater heights, through collective knowledge sharing and to avoid perpetuation of knowledge ivory towers, which can strangulate knowledge co-creation. Staff exchanges with other universities, where faculties can learn from their peers and implement the best practices at their own institutions can be another approach towards knowledge sharing (Panwar 2020: 49). Open access to knowledge and resources, as a means for information sharing is another important criterion under the CE domain (Starke, Shenouda and Smith-Howell 2017: 79).

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Operationalization of CE at the interface of teaching, research and service functions of Indian HEI's

The third theme focuses on how CE is being operationalized at the interface of the higher education functions of teaching, research, and service. Accordingly, this theme has been further categorized into the following three sub-themes:

*(*While the experiences captured under this Theme reflect some of the good practices at different universities; some of the best ones are described in detail, under the upcoming Theme 4 (best practice models) and sub-theme 4.2).*

**Sub-Theme 3.1 Operationalization of CE at the interface of the teaching function**

The interviews with academics at the eight universities, involved in this study, revealed different modalities through which universities are operationalizing CE at the interface of their core teaching function. From the data which emerged; these modalities can be broadly considered under three headings, which formed the subsequent three sub-thematic sections, which are explored in detail as follows:

***Sub-thematic section 3.1.1: Specialized courses/programs, aligned with the CE philosophy***

This section focuses on the different kinds of courses introduced by various HEI's, to fulfil the broader objective of embedding CE into the higher education teaching function. In lieu of this, the diversity in the courses introduced is evident by their very nature; where at some places, they are in direct alignment with the traditional subjects being taught, while they are given a more exclusive positioning at other places.

The excerpts that follow share some of the participant reflections on the specialized courses offered, which are aligned with CE. These courses are embedded as part of the core academic subjects, and directly feed into the learning outcomes emerging from the same.

*"The service-learning course is offered to the second-year students for the three-year undergraduate programme; and in the third-year for the four-year undergraduate programme, across different disciplines...it is a 30 hour, 2 credit course...comprising 15 hours of classroom engagement and 15 hours of community engagement in a given semester…here, the students learn about the significance and fundamentals of service-learning, and apply these concepts to address community needs in real-time… develop skills to work with diverse community groups...and learn from the community through active and critical reflection" [FM 7]*

*"In the School of Vocational Educational and Training, we have a 2 credit course called Community Action Learning (CAL), which integrates academics with social issues… here, the students first identifies the problem in the communities, while working with them…that is community engagement...then outlining objectives, exploring and coming up with a solution…then taking community feedback or input on the proposed solution...that is action…and deriving learnings in the bargain...that pertains to learnings including technical skills, communication skills, etc." [FM 3]*

These excerpts, while shedding light on the different kinds of CE aligned courses, find common ground on mainly three aspects. *Firstly*, they are duly embedded in the teaching-learning (T-L) structure of the students and are assigned due academic credits. This aspect is linked to section 2.1.4 which discusses aligning CE with student's academic learning, as an important step forward in institutionalizing the practice. *Secondly*, all such courses include a fine balance between theory and field, and involve active engagement with the communities, where the students apply their theoretical knowledge and academic learnings in real life settings, to explore community problems and propose solutions. This aspect also links to the earlier discussions under section 1.2.2, which explored the conceptualization of CE in Indian HEI's as being the application of university's knowledge and skills to solve pressing community issues. And, *thirdly*, reflections and learning from the field experiences form an important component of such courses, which strengthens the argument that such courses not only provide an opportunity to achieve the dual objectives of academic learning and social development; but also, that both these aspects strengthen each other. While academic knowledge facilitates the achievement of social development objectives; the latter enriches academic learning, through opportunities to learn from real life experiences. This can also be seen as well linked to the aspect of the mutuality of benefits emerging from the CE process, as discussed in section 1.3.3.

Global CE literature documents that embedding CE within the T-L functions of HEI's, entails devising new and strategic curriculum and courses; which are in coherence with the need, issues, priorities of the society, or support community/social development, while also aligning with students learning needs and providing them with knowledge, relevant skills and right values (Hok Ka Ma and Tandon 2014: 201; PRIA

2014: 14; Rahman *et al.* 2019: 11; Farnell 2020: 33; Bidandi, Ambe and Mukong 2021: 1; Zhou, Tolleson and Yu 2022: 8). Coming under the framework of community engaged T-L, such courses integrate experiential learning opportunities in and with the surrounding communities to solve social problems faced by the latter; while also designing, delivering and evaluating an educational intervention, thereby satisfying academic requirements (Denny 2018: 7; Quillinan *et al.* 2018: 115; Shah, Preston and Dimova 2023: 3; Kuh 2008, cited in Tijsma, Urias and Zweekhorst 2023: 144). Further, a study by Sugawara *et al.* (2023: 5) found service-learning education, as the most frequently reported community-engaged program. Giving such courses the status of 'core courses'; like credit-bearing certificates, minors or majors, gives them 'academic homes', to not only formally recognize CE as a distinct part of the curriculum, but also sustain spaces for reflection and action, over a period of time (Batten *et al.* 2017: 23; Rajah 2019: 9; Butin and Seider 2012, cited in Lee 2020: 1570).

Further, another set of interviewees shared about other exclusively positioned courses, which played an important role in developing the necessary orientation for CE and were also seen as closely aligning to its core value framework. These are captured in the reflections as follows:

*"The Centre for Society University Interface and Research offers value-based, part time, 3 credit courses on topics such as folk medicine, cooperative management, micro-finance and integrated energy resource management…the courses develop in students…an understanding of social issues and that how they can make a contribution to the society...how they can solve problems...provide solutions" [FM 18]*

*"We have institution-wide compulsory core courses...three of them relating to community engagement are…'rural development', for enhancing of rural life and solving social problems; 'agricultural operations', for creating an awareness of agricultural processes and exposure to rural realities…and 'social service', for inculcating the spirit of service, humility and societal commitment...these courses need to be studied by all students as a compulsory component for graduation" [FM 29]*

*"We have a mandatory course for all students on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); so, students when they learn SDG…they try to link academics and society, say, the civil engineering students…they are encouraged to explore as to how they*

*can use their knowledge to solve the water overflow problem...or students from other science disciplines study waste management...and then go and work with the municipal corporation to come up with solutions" [AL 8]*

As evident in these excerpts, some Indian HEI's are also seen as offering innovative courses, focusing on diverse topics, which are designed in a way that promotes CE and builds an orientation for the same. Another common thread linking such courses is that they inculcate social responsibilities in students, so that they emerge as global, ethical citizens; rather than a productive, but mechanical, work force. This is achieved, as the courses promote active engagement with the communities or community partners, not only for developing an understanding of social issues, but also working towards the pursuit of addressing social challenges and for being of service to society. It is also important to note here that, barring the first participant; the other two participants shared about courses which are compulsory for all students at the university, as an essential criterion for graduation. This is an important progress towards institutionalization, which also links to the prior discussions under section 2.1.4 which explored the positioning of CE as an essential graduation requirement.

Global CE literature documents examples of such CE aligned courses, such as the Community Wellness Empowerment, Leadership and Lifeskills (CWell), a two-year diploma program, at the University of Limerick, in Ireland (Quillinan *et al.* 2018: 113); civic engagement course programs, being run at several universities in the USA (Batten *et al.* 2017: 6); and community studio, a social innovation-oriented suite of experiential learning courses, at the University of Northern British Columbia, in Canada (Groulx *et al.* 2021: 274). The core characteristics of such courses include applying acquired theoretical knowledge in practice, for achieving social development outcomes, while facilitating learning and reflection, thereby providing genuine education opportunities to help students transform into socially responsible citizens (Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 114; Nicolaides and Austin 2022: 197; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 232; Snijder *et al.* 2023: 5). In the Indian context in particular, such engaged courses can help to further rural development agendas, through participation, dialogues and an opportunity to tune in with the practicalities of rural life (Singh and Tandon 2017: 2). Finally, scholars like Saltmarsh, Middleton and

Quan (2019: 20) and Dube and Hendricks (2023: 138) advocated in favour of such courses being an important part of the graduation requirement.

### *Sub-thematic section 3.1.2: Integration of CE in the existing academic curriculum*

In addition to devising and introducing exclusive courses on CE (as discussed in previous section); another set of participants shared their experiences of integrating CE in the existing curriculum of the traditional subjects, in the academic framework, through a variety of embedment techniques. The following excerpts provide a glimpse into how CE elements have been incorporated in the existing course design and made a part of its intended objectives and outcomes:

*"Concept to Practice (C2P) is a systematic and mandatory academic intervention, integrated in all courses and disciplines, right from the very first semester, up to the final semester…where slowly the skills of the students are built in the first two semesters (first year), which includes observation with empathy...identifying the problems...and then in the second year (third and fourth semester) …going on to propose a solution. The objective of C2P is to enhance the problem-solving skills of the students" [AL 9]*

*"Exposure to the communities…or working in the communities is integrated into the departmental curriculum or their functioning in some or the other way…so students cannot escape that...as it is required for graduation...it may be a social responsibility project in Business Administration…or teaching slums, government schools/college students in English…service-learning projects in Engineering…some departments have village exposure…architecture has some rural interventions, etc." [AL 5]*

Three significant lessons emerge from these insights. *Firstly*, if CE is being embedded into the existing courses; such embedment should be systemic and holistic, rather than a part-time or stop-gap arrangement, and in a way that has clear implications on how the course is conducted and delivered. As a result, the manifestation of CE in such courses emerges as a continuous aspect of student learning. *Secondly*, such embedment needs to be tailored to the disciplinary context of the subject, and there are various models that can be adopted in this regard (projects, community-based interventions, etc.). Essentially, it depends on how best disciplinary learning can be

used to effect engagement, which can have mutual benefits for all stakeholders. *Finally*, as a natural outcome of such embedment, CE becomes a part of a student's graduation experience and requirement both. As a result, it is no longer an option, but becomes a compulsory component, which has important implications with regards to the institutionalization objectives (as discussed under Theme 2).

Consistent with these findings, there has been much support expressed in the literature, for the need to be flexible in curriculum design processes, which helps in moulding it towards CE, and most importantly, the institutional support required for the same (PRIA 2014: 14; UNESCO Chair in CBRSR 2015a: 17; Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 61; Quillinan *et al.* 2018: 124). Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy (2022: 112) documented the example of implementation of science shops concepts in the existing courses on corporate social responsibility and local economic development. Further, Snijder *et al.* (2023: 5) described the inclusion of semester long collaborative activities, aimed at public engagement, as an additional component in existing credit bearing courses. Such courses aimed at enriching the theoretical content and providing opportunities to apply acquired knowledge in practice, thereby deriving societal benefits in the bargain (Snijder *et al.* 2023: 5).

Further, other interviewees shared examples of the attempts made to revise the existing curricula to incorporate CE elements, as highlighted in the following excerpts:

*"Considering the vast tribal context of surrounding population, in and around the university…most of the subjects and disciplines in the university are adding a bit of tribal context in their syllabus...which includes some form of community engagement with the tribal communities, in order to address their concerns and work for their welfare" [FM 23]*

*"Our founders believe that education should confer a sense of purpose of serving society...but they felt that current curricula lacked real-world relevance…it conferred degrees - but did not create competencies…therefore, from inception, our focus was on vocationalizing education through skill integration...so, syllabus was designed in a way which centred on action learning in and with the community...this was the core ..the idea was to develop critical competencies, for serving the society" [AL 3]*

*"Even in the traditional courses that we have...there is a constant effort to add contemporary contexts by revision...which is officiated through the Board of Studies...then Academic Council…Faculty Board...we also invite external experts for helping in revising or modifying the courses...for connecting theory and real-life contexts…this makes the subject relevant...and also gives an opportunity to students to learn and work on contemporary social issues" [FM 29]*

Three main observations emerge from these excerpts. *Firstly*, revision of the existing subjects to integrate CE, can emerge either from the need to cater to the requirements of the neighbouring communities and application of academic learning to further social development agendas; or, the need to provide a more contemporary or real-world relevance to the existing curriculum. *Secondly*, such revision needs to be officiated through institutional arrangements and formal structures, so that it is validated and is accepted university wide. This is also important from a long-term institutionalization perspective. And *thirdly*, in addition to internal efforts and brainstorming; such revision can also be made more comprehensive, by integrating suggestions from external experts or CE practitioners, who can provide new and fresh ideas for connecting the curriculum with real-life circumstances, in a more meaningful way.

Exploring global CE literature in light of these findings, it was found that Batten *et al.* (2017: 11) provided examples of how existing courses and programs can be leveraged, by way of incorporating CE as a requirement. This can also ensure broad exposure and participation, and provide a means for ensuring that students experience CE in some form, as part of their college experience, and broader graduation requirements (Batten *et al.* 2017: 11). Further, Quillinan *et al.* (2018: 115), while describing the CWell program at the University of Limerick, asserted that such revisions or designs incorporating CE into courses, can emerge from the prioritization of needs of the local community, while satisfying the academic requirement under the university framework.

Along similar lines, top HEI's in the USA were documented as attempting to transform their Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs by incorporating CE, as a means for ensuring authentic engagement of students in sustainability initiatives and finding sustainable solutions for social problems (Zizka, McGunagle and Clark 2021: 2). Another interesting example in this context, emerged

from the work of Coles-Ritchie *et al.* (2022: 2) who shared about the integration of community engaged project in the Psychology of Women course, taught at a small liberal arts college. In the Indian context, Bhagwan (2022: 1424) narrated an example of the inclusion of the tribal context in the social work curriculum at an Indian HEI, as a way to create critical consciousness about social realities of tribals in India.

### *Sub-thematic section 3.1.3: Incorporation of engaged pedagogies in teaching and learning*

Post the discussions on the integration of CE into T-L processes, by means of specialized courses or embedment into the existing ones (as in the preceding sections); this section focuses on the incorporation of engaged pedagogies in such processes. This emerged from the participant interviews, as they shared about the different kind of pedagogies, and opined that such creative, engaged, and innovative pedagogical techniques facilitated the achievement of learning outcomes, in terms of both engagement and academic perspectives.

The following excerpts provide evidence of how various forms of applied or experiential learning, based on action and reflection, was used at different universities, to advance and improve learning outcomes for the students:

*"Experiential learning pedagogy is commonly used for students…which includes action and reflection, to set up the linkage with their theory...and apply it for social benefits…here, they are also supervised by faculty, so that they can duly reflect on their experience…because we believe that information needs to be experienced to be transformed into knowledge and wisdom...this includes critical thinking, reflective learning" [AL 14]*

*"To make students understand the abstraction of theory…it is important to connect it with realism...so, we have an innovative pedagogy called Labs on Land...which is a hall mark feature of our teaching methodology...this focuses on working in collaboration with community...this methodology gives an opportunity to apply academic theories for social advancement and is being used in the areas of renewable energy, dairy technology, creation of smart villages, etc. [AL 20]*

*“We have problem-based learning, all across the university...in all technical courses...here, students study community-based problems and solve them...and it is a part of the student’s curriculum as well” [AL 12]*

*“We have project-based learning...students conduct small project-based studies...and the idea is to provide students with an exposure to rural communities...to develop an understanding of rural realities…explore the problems, reflect on their interconnections and find out potential solutions” [FM 18]*

Three key takeaways emerge from these excerpts. *Firstly*, engaged pedagogies are used a medium to connect the abstractness of academic theory with real world relevance. *Secondly*, they involve two key components of action and reflection, where the former is used for facilitating community development, while the latter aids academic learning. Doing so, students ‘learn by doing, or from experience’, as they attempt to address community challenges and propose appropriate solutions. *Thirdly,* such pedagogies are equally relevant for a range of academic disciplines ranging from engineering to social sciences and can be used to work on a variety of community relevant issues. Such pedagogies also present as an opportunity for the students to engage in social development processes and develop an ethic of social consciousness and responsibility in the bargain.

Application of similar engaged pedagogies for effecting CE and academic objectives have been reported by several CE scholars. An engaged stance to T-L processes involves learning through multi-modal pedagogical methods, in addition to classroom and lab (Tandon 2017: 6), which vary in duration, outreach, resources and nature (Welch 2016: 138). Such pedagogies are designed to address situated social problems and build student capacities (Lake, Motley and Moner 2022: 30) inclusively and equitably (Lake, Motley and Moner 2022: 30). The commonly used approach in this regard, emerges to be experiential learning, which focuses on engagement in real-life situations (Lee 2020: 1570; Warren and Sellnow 2021: 25). Further, the aspects of active learning and critical reflection is crucial for achieving real objectives for the community, and helps learners emerge as critical and innovative thinkers, capable to tackle issues and come up with solutions (Rajah 2019: 11; Constantinou 2020: 2; Bhagwan, Naidu and Panwar 2022: 1129; Coles-Ritchie *et al.* 2022: 6). Other contemporary approaches to engaged pedagogies is seen in the application of project-

based learning (Tirres and Schikore 2020: 92; Zizka, McGunagle and Clark 2021: 8) or problem-based learning (Arnold 2022: 199), for fostering CE and social responsibilities by enabling deeper understanding of communities and their problems. In essence, community-based learning, built on engaged pedagogies combines classroom instruction, community service, student reflection and civic responsibility, results in mutual benefits and can be applied to a wide range of disciplines (Farnell 2020: 34).

Another set of participants provided an account of specialized and creative pedagogical tools, such as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and storytelling; that they employed in their T-L processes, under the broad framework of engaged pedagogies. These are detailed as in the excerpts that follow:

*"Our Agriculture students...used Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools...but now, we are changing our approaches from PRA to Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), which is more holistic, and involves deeper community relationships and community based learning…so, while we collect data on crop varieties...animal varieties...we are also learning from the farmers...both faculty members and students...so the farmers are training us...so this is the approach we are following, which combines learning and action...I believe it is a much more holistic approach" [FM 2]*

*"In order to identify problems, we engage students with communities and make them document their sad stories and happy stories….kind of story-telling technique...as to what makes a person happy or comfortable and what makes him sad or uncomfortable...this also helps in connecting with communities through an empathetic approach...then identifying the problem and developing solutions...so such tools are needed...you need to give the students some tools or technique so that they achieve the outcome…and all this comes under academic integration" [AL 9]*

On delving deeper, these excerpts reveal three important observations. *Firstly*, creative, innovative, and engaged pedagogies facilitate a deeper connection with communities, and eases the process of rapport development, which is a key factor in any CE intervention. This in turn hinges on having a good understanding of the communities, their contexts, strengths, and weaknesses. Further, adoption of such pedagogies can be adapted as per the context of the community, in which the work is

to be done. *Secondly*, this deep connection also facilitates co-learning from and with the communities; by drawing on their vast, traditional wisdom, which is a valuable source of knowledge. This also connects well to the discussions under sub-section 1.3.3, which focused on the value of co-learning and its role in deriving mutual benefits from the CE process. And, *thirdly*, such exercises result in the development of an empathetic approach, which helps to further blur the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This also helps in unlearning of prior conceptions or misconceptions, thereby helping in approaching the communities from a more open-minded perspective.

Global CE literature also expresses support for participatory methodologies like PRA and PLA; which represent a structured investigation for identifying social problems in collaboration with the community, for the purpose of education and bringing about positive social change (Preece 2017: 167; Machimana *et al.* 2021: 56; Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera 2023: 8). Lee (2020: 1571) termed such collaborative approaches under engaged T-L processes, as 'higher education democracy initiatives', which blurs the boundaries between education and community. On the other hand, Houston and Lange (2018: 46) asserted that it destabilizes normative categories of us/them; resourced/impoverished; classroom/field etc. Another interesting approach in this regard, has been the use of arts-based methodologies, such as poems, music, art or storytelling for initiating dialogues, which is key for a collaborative process like CE (Pasquesi 2020: 32; Davaslioglu and Lizarazo 2022: 41; Kelly and Given 2023: 5).

**Sub-Theme 3.2 Operationalization of CE at the interface of the research function**

Considered as one of key higher education functions; research presents itself as an essential core of academic practice. Exploration of the operationalization of CE into the research function, revealed three main components, which have been presented as the following three sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 3.2.1: Multiple research approaches, undertaken in partnership with community***

Several different forms of community engaged research (CER) approaches were seen as being practiced at the universities involved in the current study. However, the common factor between all such approaches was that it was driven by the immediate

needs of the community; was based on a collaborative approach; and was guided by an overarching social welfare agenda. These ideas are highlighted in some of the interview excerpts as follows:

*"We have a Compassion Driven Research (CDR) approach…it means that it is important to do research with compassion. Along with this, the research problem is defined by the community…that is what guides our research approach…and the ultimate goal is to uplift or do something good for the society…for example, like in engineering, it is using technology to build something which is beneficial for the people, in partnership with them…for addressing problems related to sustainability" [FM 16]*

*"One fundamental thing is that…both the identification of problem and the exploration of solution...both is in consultation with the community...every aspect of the research project is wholly discussed with them…they are basically co-researchers, and pitch in with their knowledge and experience…even the research questions were discussed with them, before finalization…and then they took part in the entire process…including data collection" [FM 25]*

*"We have adopted the Community Partnership Research (CPR) model...which is done in collaboration with the community...and it is completely based on the needs of the local communities that we identify through a systematic need assessment...so, that is like a necessity...a thumb rule here…..that whatever project we design...it considers the social impact and benefits on the nearby community...in fact, such social outcomes or how the research is going to benefit the community, is outlined right in the research proposal itself" [AL 21]*

*"The main purpose of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) that we undertake is…understanding community's problems and solving them together…along with the communities, utilizing their knowledge systems...also because, for the local problems, we cannot find global solutions...not by sitting someplace far away…so that is why local solutions have to be devised in collaboration with local communities…so that those solutions are suited to their needs and are helpful for them" [AL 19]*

These insights reveal four important observations, within the context under discussion. *Firstly*, the common thread binding all excerpts highlight that, universities are using

the academic research function as a medium for application of its knowledge, skills, and expertise for deriving positive and beneficial social outcomes for the community, by way of addressing challenges and devising solutions. However, this overarching social welfare agenda is explicitly driven by the immediate needs and concerns of the local community, and how such engaged research approaches can best address the same. This links to the earlier discussion under Theme 1 (on the conceptualization of CE) and section 1.2.2 which explored the concept of 'engagement' on similar lines. *Secondly*, for successfully achieving the large-scale objectives of social action and social change; it is of utmost importance that the research topic at hand, is of shared social concern, for both stakeholders. This is what makes the joint definition of research problems, of paramount importance. Additionally, having equal stakes in the process is also connected to the earlier discussions on the mutuality of engagement outcomes as being the core characterizing feature of all such partnerships.

*Thirdly*, the coming together of diverse and varied knowledge forms, as universities and communities work together in collaboration, results in the co-production of new knowledge which combines the theoretical expertise of the university stakeholders and the practical wisdom of the communities. This proves to be more useful for dealing with pressing problems, or the aspects which the research topic focuses on. Further, this will not only harness local knowledge; but also generate solutions from the community's standpoint and utility, which can thereby guarantee its usefulness and sustainability, or both. This links to similar discussions under section 1.3.1 under Theme 1, on collaborative partnerships and the co-production of knowledge. *Fourthly*, while the broad objectives of all such research approaches remains common; different terminologies for the same have appeared in the context of Indian HEI's, such as Compassion Driven Research (CDR), Community Partnership Research (CPR) and Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). However, among these, CBPR appears as enjoying maximum popularity, judging by the fact that almost half of the sample universities included in the study have introduced and begun to implement this practice in their academic framework.

These findings cohere with the globally documented CE literature. Considering the broad framework of engaged research, De Santis *et al.* (2019: 151) reported the presence of multiple terms under this umbrella, such as Community Based

Participatory Research (CBPR), Community Based Research (CBR), collaboration research, partnership research, participatory action research, etc. However, notwithstanding the terminologies used, such research approaches are driven by locally relevant community needs and issues and involves generation of innovative solutions for ensuring overall well-being of communities and holistic societal transformation (Rahman *et al.* 2019: 11; Farnell 2020: 36; Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 231; Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera 2023: 3). Further, CER approaches involve working in collaboration with community members, researchers, and other stakeholders in the research process, while recognizing each of their unique strengths (DeJonckheere *et al.* 2019, cited in Machimana *et al.* 2021: 54; Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera 2023: 3; Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 5). Therefore, it stresses on moving away from a 'research on model' to a 'researching with model', which places communities at the centre, recognizing them as knowledge rich partners in the research process, having voice and agency; rather than viewing them as research objects (Van Eeden, Eloff and Dippenaar 2021: 8; Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 116).

These processes then facilitate shared co-creation of knowledge, which allows all members to observe, imagine, shape and contribute to the research process equally, by starting from the existing knowledge and experience of both communities and university researchers and exploring the connections between them (Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 50; Koekkoek, Van Ham and Kleinhans 2021: 7; Mutero and Chimbari 2021: 129). Adding to these arguments, Mutero and Chimbari (2021: 118) argued that under such innovative research approaches, universities and different stakeholders coalesce to find solutions to some of the community's intractable problems. As a result, engaged research emerges as a viable tool for advancing CE that culminates in sustainable community development (Sibhensana and Maistry 2023: 197). Summing up the arguments, Molosi-France and Dipholo (2022: 118) posited that in such CER approaches, everyone has the knowledge to share, and everyone has lessons to learn, through the exchange of ideas and information between the research partners.

### *Sub-thematic section 3.2.2: Constituent pillars of community engaged research processes*

Having explored the basic fabric of engaged research processes in the preceding section; this section focuses on some of the constituent pillars as comprising of the core construction of such CER processes, as shared by the participants. Although the terminologies used by HEI's differed, it is interesting to note that most of them adhered to some basic core components, which appeared to be the common factor among all such practices. Some of such components are discussed below.

The following excerpts share a couple of participant reflections on their approach to such engaged research processes, which was structured, phased, with definite plans for entering and exiting the field, and involved a balance between theory and field activities:

*"We have a well-thought out research process, which is done in 3 phases…in the first phase, we prepare to enter the field, which is based on establishment of relationships...connecting with local village people and functionaries…this is actually longer and more challenging…the second phase is the implementation phase, where we do our data collection...the process involves community as partners and is guided by ethics…so that is really our credo …and then we prepare to exit the field...which is our third phase...but this also properly planned as our idea is to invest in long term and sustainable relationships with communities in the field" [AL 13]*

*"Our research plan is always this interplay between theoretical knowledge and field engagement...we come back to our desk and refine...so that is our implementation...so it goes hand in hand...and that is very much supported with our lectures...this is mainly to ensure that the researchers in the field are in a better position to deal with real-life situations more meaningfully and also derive valuable learnings from the process, as part of reflective exercises in the classroom" [AL 14]*

The second core component of such research processes was the use of arts-based methods of enquiry, for collecting data in and with the communities. These are outlined as in the following excerpts:

*"In one of our projects, which focused on domestic waste management in slum localities…we went to four different communities to explore as to how they were managing their domestic waste...here, we adopted arts-based methods...because in the communities we were trying to work with...it was the best means to communicate*

*with them, as people responded to it…and they actually gelled in well...we used pictures, drawings, visual representations…which they also enjoyed" [FM 13]*

*"With respect to modes of enquiry...storytelling is an important method we employ when working in the communities…there we also use nukkad nataks or street plays which are awareness based or issue based....so these methods we are using under the Community Based Participatory Research approach...which we apply in different areas like education, securing sustainable livelihoods for communities, etc." [FM 24]*

Finally, the last component of such research processes included public sharing of findings, with external stakeholders and especially with the communities, who were part of the process, in a way that they co-own the information and the data. This is reflected in the excerpts that follow:

*"Doing a community-engaged research is fine, but even on closing the project, the community has to be made co-owners of the findings as well…say, you went to the field…you worked with communities...conducted the project...then, in the end...you also have a responsibility to share the information and findings with them…this is very important" [FM 23]*

*"We try to simplify and convert the technical findings into common language...which can be easily understood by all the relevant stakeholders…who have stakes in the research process…like in any project we do with tribals on malnutrition or health...our effort is to share the findings with not only the tribal community...but also panchayat…forest officials…who are important actors in the tribal community ecosystem…so basically sharing the knowledge in a language which is easy to understand…so that the recommendations can be put into action" [FM 26]*

Viewing these insights as an addendum to the findings emerging in the previous section; four key lessons emerge. *Firstly*, all the components described above, present clear points of differentiation between CER approaches and traditional research. While the latter is centred strongly on a researcher defined agenda, who also leads the entire process; CER approaches are built on the premise of having community as co-researchers in the process, right from its inception (as outlined in the previous section), till the dissemination of findings (as outlined in this section). *Secondly,* CER approaches are driven by the ultimate objective of positive social change, involving

social action. This is done either by solving pressing community problems; or improving their quality of life, by focusing on crucial aspects like education, health, livelihoods etc. To achieve this, such approaches involve a structured process of entering communities, conducting research, and exiting the field, where building long term community relationships emerges as a priority. This field-based action is complemented with reflection, which is achieved through maintaining a balance between classroom and field.

*Thirdly*, considering that participation of communities as co-researchers in the process, lies at the heart of such CER approaches (as discussed in the previous section); the data collection processes adopted are also more creative and innovative ones. Such processes appreciate and incorporate the diverse epistemologies of community knowledge(s). Accordingly, art-based methods find much popularity in such research approaches, which not only contributes to rapport development, but also helps communities elicit their viewpoints and knowledge more expressively. And *finally*, one of the significant components of the process, which also gives the entire effort a meaningful closure is the sharing of research findings with communities themselves and the local relevant stakeholders. This not only validates the co-ownership of the study by the communities; but, sharing with a larger set of local stakeholders also facilitates the necessary action at the policy or implementation level.

On situating the above findings amidst global CE literature; several parallels can be drawn. For instance, Hart, Daniels and September-Brown (2023: 231) and Singh and Tandon (2017: 4), argued that not only is engaged research anchored in topics of local relevance, and is carried out in consultation with local stakeholders; but that community participation is integrated throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis and dissemination of research findings (Kelly and Given 2023: 6; Gilmore *et al.* 2020, cited in Mthembu, Chimbari and Macherera 2023: 3). This consolidates the argument that CER involves a systematic set of processes right from the building of relationships and partnerships till the end, when the findings are disseminated (Singh 2021: 123). However, an important component of these, includes maintaining a balance between classroom and field, for unlearning and relearning from experiences, through active and critical reflection; in a way that can benefit the

scholarship of teaching and learning (Hall *et al.* 2016: 28; Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 117).

Further, the embedment of arts-based methods as a valid form of enquiry, which includes photos, poems, music or arts; also contributes towards developing skills for building relationships, active and humble listening and facilitating dialogues and dialogic interactions (Pasquesi 2020: 32; Mutero and Chimbari 2021: 133; Málovics, Juhász and Bajmócy 2022: 114). Equally important in this context is the dissemination of findings and knowledge gained to all partners, and the broader society for effective and sustainable social change (De Santis *et al.* 2019: 152; Nicolaides and Austin 2022: 196). This includes impactful knowledge transfer, which is co-owned by respective communities and which has become a key component in new knowledge creation (Hart, Daniels and September-Brown 2023: 231).

### *Sub-thematic section 3.2.3: Practice of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) being operationalized by CBPR hubs*

Considering the popularity of the practice of CBPR in the sample HEI's selected for this study; this section focuses on how it is being promoted by the CBPR hubs, established by such institutions. As shared by the participants, these hubs (as also referenced earlier in the chapter, under the discussion on the establishment of CE structures (sub-section 2.2.2) under Theme 2 on the institutionalization of CE), represent partnerships between the university and a local CSO, for advancing CBPR. As part of the hub, the CBPR mentors (faculty members trained in the research methodology) steer the process of CBPR development in the university, through designing CBPR courses, ensuring its curricular integration and mentoring and guiding the students in this area of engaged research.

Interview discussions with some of such CBPR mentors at three of such HEI's, who have been engaging in this practice, as part of the hub's efforts; revealed some of the progress made in this context. Here, the mentors shared that such efforts mainly fell into two categories: (i) introduction of CBPR courses and, (ii) CBPR projects undertaken by the mentors themselves.

The following excerpts highlight some of the reflections shared by participants from all three HEI's in terms of how the CBPR course was introduced, its basic design and other allied details:

*"Initially we launched a certificate course in Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), under the hub…now it has been introduced as a course under the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), having 4 credits...this is one of our success stories, from an institutionalization perspective...under CBCS, students from any discipline can opt for this course, which includes both theory and practice, and go for its classes, like any other regular course...we have also officially recommended to the Board of Academic Studies, to include a unit on CBPR in the Masters in Philosophy and doctoral course work, and our Vice-Chancellor has been supportive of this idea" [FM 25]*

*"In 2018, we introduced an open elective on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) with credits, which was floated under the hub and hosted by department of economics, under the Choice Based Credit System...the syllabus included the theory on CBPR, research methods, especially arts based and project-based case studies...it was open to all university students. Before the pandemic, around 60-70 students per batch were engaged and the feedback was wonderful...but during the pandemic...the course was moved online...and the credits was withdrawn...so this impacted the course operations and also student reception to the course" [FM 11]*

*"Under the hub, we introduced a course on Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), hosted by the Department of Sociology and Social Work…it is an open elective course, which can be opted by graduate students from any discipline…it is a semester long course having 2 credits...the course is designed to provide learning opportunities in engaged research and acquire new engaged research skills...the course is conducted in both virtual and classroom mode…we also plan to introduce it as part of PhD course work" [AL 7]*

These excerpts present four key observations. *Firstly*, in all three universities, the mode of integration of CBPR into regular academic curriculum was its introduction as an optional subject under the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). However, as per the first participant, it was first introduced as a certificate course, and later adopted into the CBCS curricular framework. Nevertheless, a majority of the institutions also

plan to include CBPR as a core component of PhD course work, going forward. This points towards the fact that institutionalizing a practice is a slow and a phased process. The first step in this direction is to first embed the process into the framework of institutional practices and vocabulary. *Secondly*, in all the instances, the CBPR course was attached with academic credits, when offered as an elective under the CBCS system. However, as per the second participant, the university in its attempt to adapt with the pandemic challenge, moved the course online. This was also accompanied with the course being detached with credits, due to internal policy matters (as shared by participant during the interview). This negatively impacted the motivation and interest of the students, and the course, which initially found good reception, was seen to be losing its popularity. While this is the challenge that the university faced; another university (as shared by the third participant) addressed this challenge by provisioning for both virtual and face to face delivery of the CBPR course, while retaining the academic credits. This provides evidence for the argument that operationalizing a new practice in the academic framework, often faces challenges, and the institution needs to work its way around it, which comes from its commitment to the practice.

*Thirdly*, for showcasing the applicability of CBPR approach in all academic disciplines; the course was opened to students from different disciplines. Here, they were introduced to the theories and concepts of CBPR, and worked on small-scale case study research projects, as part of the practical component of the course. However, a noteworthy aspect here is that, despite the good ideas and efforts, CBPR courses in all three universities still has an optional status only, and is not a mandatory component. This points to the fact that although good efforts have emerged, there is a still long way to go, with respect to achieving full institutionalization of engaged practices at Indian HEI's. *Finally*, the last observation is that although all such courses are hosted by different academic disciplines; they broadly fell under the social sciences umbrella. This may reinforce the traditionally held notion of CE/CBPR being a prerogative of social sciences disciplines only. Further, consolidation of this notion, may also prove to be antithetical to the original idea of engaged practices as being equally relevant for all academic disciplines.

Further, another aspect that was discussed in the interviews with the participants, under the topic of promotion of CBPR by the hubs, were the exclusive CBPR projects

that were conducted under its umbrella. Here, the mentors shared some of their own related project experiences, which they undertook as part of their CBPR training, and whose lessons they are now using to frame useful CBPR field experiences for the students, as part of the course. A few of such experiences as shared by the academics, is reflected in the following excerpts:

*"Under a project on ante-natal health care...different partners and stakeholders such as community health workers, community women, para-medical staff, academicians were involved...and in consultation with them...the research topics were identified...which related to maternal health and related issues...like nutrition, heath care issues...access to health care facilities etc…tools like Focussed Group Discussion and arts-based methods were used for data collection…here, interesting findings emerged...and we were able to explore the local and traditional health practices, preserved through generations, such as diet patterns, hygiene practices, etc…so, through the experience of this project, we understood that the university and community play a complementary role in the process of co-creation of knowledge...reflections also formed an important part of the learning process" [FM 25]*

*"In one of the projects we did on waste management in local slum communities...it is very unique how this engagement happens...we go there with certain mind frame…but the communities look at the issue from a completely different perspective…and from which, we also learn...they put forth pertinent questions...like, normally, you would feel that providing a door to door collection can be a solution to the problem…but then, they say why it will not work in their context...like, there might be very narrow alleys or muggy, soggy streets...and because of that pick-up vans may not enter or other issues...so Community Based Participatory Research allowed for a thorough investigation.. building on both ours and their perspectives...and a mutual solution was arrived at in the end…which involved waste collection at a community bin site...managed by the communities themselves, with the help of local government functionaries" [FM 13]*

Three key takeaways emerge from these reflections. *Firstly*, clear parallels can be drawn between the ideas shared in these excerpts and the basic fabric and constituents of CER approaches, as discussed in the preceding couple of sections. These include joint definition of research problems; use of arts-based methods as

mode of enquiry/data collection and fostering community conversations; co-creation of knowledge which combines the technical expertise of university researchers with the practical knowledge of the communities; and finally, action, complemented by reflection to derive meaningful learnings out of the process. *Secondly,* the excerpts also bear testimony to the argument that CBPR can be applied in diverse areas such as healthcare, waste management, etc. Nevertheless, in all such cases, the community remained at the core of the research process. And, *thirdly*, several other collateral objectives were also seen as being met in the process. Some of them were, the documentation and systematization of indigenous knowledge, as they are incorporated as part of formal research process; speeding up of social development agenda, through the involvement of local government functionaries, who could aid the implementation of social action on the ground, etc.

Exploring global literature, related to these findings, Sibhensana and Maistry (2023: 199), while documenting the practices of RUCE (Rhodes University Community Engagement), elucidated the latter's effort in establishing hubs, in association with local civil society entities, in an effort to make the university more porous. Such hubs provisioned collective spaces where academics and community partners can collaborate and discuss various engaged scholarship opportunities (Sibhensana and Maistry 2023: 199). With respect to the integration of CBPR in the academic curriculum, Fontaine (2006: 48) argued that it can either be offered by way of dedicated and exclusive courses; be incorporated within a research methods course; and/or be used as a method for research projects. Here, Molosi-France and Dipholo (2022: 119) noted that most of the curriculum which has integrated CBPR as an exclusive component, reiterate the notion that learning is not something that is done to, or given to the students; but it is an experience which is co-created in the process of reflection, observation and analysis. To do so, CBPR curriculum should theoretically ground the students, while simultaneously arming them with the practical skills of participatory and engaged research (Molosi-France and Dipholo 2022: 119). Further, as previously noted in the case of engaged T-L processes, engaged research can also be applied in a range of disciplines for effecting social change (Farnell 2020: 37). Summing up the ideas, Molosi-France and Dipholo (2022: 113) asserted that CBPR should not be considered as just another method of research; but, as a means to enrich the scholarship of teaching and learning for students from different disciplines, by

providing an opportunity to connect theory and practice through enhanced civic engagement.

**Sub-Theme 3.3: Operationalization of CE at the interface of the service function**

Having discussed the various dimensions of operationalization of CE under the teaching and research function in Indian HEI's in the preceding sub-themes; the last sub-theme (under the broader theme of operationalization of CE in academic functions), focuses on how CE is being implemented as part of the service function of different HEI's, selected for the study at hand. Considering the wide variety of manifestations of service, as being performed by different entities at these HEI's, this sub-theme has been further divided into the following three sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 3.3.1: General knowledge sharing with the community***

Under the operationalization of CE under the service function; a fair number of activities, as shared by the interviewees, fell into the category of general knowledge sharing through various community-focused activities, conducted by different academic departments. These service-based activities broadly fell into four categories, as discussed below.

The following excerpts detail the educative or literary services being offered by universities and its departments to the neighbouring communities:

*"The Department of Education, as part of the curriculum, conducts literacy camps...where students under the Diploma of Education course or the Bachelor of Master of Education course...they impart teaching in the government schools of nearby villages....and also render valuable service" [FM 21]*

*"We also help communities conceptualize their business proposals and submit it to the bank for funding...because when such proposals are routed through the university, the chance of their acceptance increases...so, the objective is to extend help to the communities…specially for the people who lost their jobs...we are using this model as an extra-curricular activity…we take their business plan…help them conceptualize it better and then apply for loans on their behalf, to help them financially" [FM 1]*

Another set of participants shared about the services offered, for enhancing income generation and supporting sustainable livelihoods of communities. The following few excerpts highlight some of such efforts:

*"The social work department, as part of its curriculum, conducts a lot of programs focused on income generation…for example, we conduct courses on vermicomposting and dairy farming in the villages, for the village women...in addition to that, we are also connected with many local organizations for conducting vocational training programs…so we do networking with them, and organize programs accordingly" [FM 22]*

*"Under one of our social enterprise initiatives...you will find these massive tailoring and stitching hubs…right inside the campus…and it is mainly the community women who are there...many of whom are physically challenged...and are not able to speak or hear…they are all students there…also, almost a crore has been invested for developing the sign language...through which they can easily work…so they go there…get trained and finally start and run their own businesses" [AL 1]*

Further, another significant share of service initiatives aimed at providing quality healthcare to the communities, is highlighted in the following excerpts:

*"The villages with which this campus has been associated, is a very long association...there, our departments offer different kinds of services...like the pharmacy students go there for conducting hygiene awareness programs, health testing…Post graduate diploma students in medical lab technology go there, have an interaction with them, conduct awareness programs on health and hygiene...and it is greatly appreciated…as there, they don't have these kind of facilities" [AL 9]*

*"Department of Ayurveda is particularly engaged in creating awareness on the issue of health and hygiene in the community, especially among girls and women…so we organize health camps…where we also tie up with some local pharmacies to make available some basic medicines for free for the community" [FM 20]*

Finally, in addition to the above issue-focused services, some of the participants also shared regarding some miscellaneous services, being offered by various departments. Such services were aimed at general awareness creation and knowledge sharing, for

overall socio-economic development and empowerment of communities. Some of such experiences are reflected in the following excerpts:

*"School of Fisheries in collaboration with the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), organizes a variety of awareness programs for farmers related to aquaculture and fish processing…and provides hands-on training on the preparation of fish pickles, shrimp pickles and other value-added products. As fisheries and aquaculture is an untapped sector at Paralakhemundi...so, whenever there is any new technique in this regard, or there is an announcement from the government, regarding any economic benefits, we immediately disseminate it to the farming community" [AL 4]*

*"A lot of information sharing is continuously happening...like we organized a long campaign on digital India...to make people aware of the usage of related applications...then, assistance is also provided for improving the financial and socio-economic conditions...such as, promotion of home industries for women empowerment...in terms of environmental protection, we educate communities on preservation of natural resources and use of clean energy sources...while not linked to the curriculum in particular, we have been undertaking such activities, as it is closely linked to our community philosophy" [AL 21]*

On studying these excerpts, the broad takeaway that can be drawn, is that a variety of service-based activities, focusing on diverse social components/issues (like education, health, livelihoods, general information sharing), are being facilitated by universities and their respective departments for overall development and empowerment of the communities. This connects well to the discussion under sub-section 1.2.2, which explored that one of the ways in which Indian HEI's conceptualize CE is that it serves to effect community empowerment and development. Further, on deeper exploration of the excerpts and its interlinkages with each other, four broad observations emerge. *Firstly*, most of such service activities fell outside the curricular framework, and are conducted as extra-curricular activities, barring few exceptions such as in the education or social work department, whose service activities feed into its curriculum. However, despite the dominant extra-curricular status, such activities represented the core ethos of the university ideology and beliefs, in terms of achieving community empowerment and sustainable social change. *Secondly*, an array of

departments, belonging to different academic disciplines, such as Education, Ayurveda, Pharmacy, Social Work, Chemistry, Agriculture, Fisheries; are engaged in providing services to the communities. The overall objective here is to secure dignified, sustainable, and quality lives and lifestyle for the communities.

*Thirdly*, while the service-based activities were mostly undertaken by the departments independently; in some instances, some of them also collaborated with local institutions (governmental; non-governmental, as in the case of ATMA and local pharmacies respectively), who stepped in to support the departmental service efforts. And *lastly*, among all such activities, particular focus was on serving the marginalized and deprived communities, particularly women, and also the physically challenged ones, with the objective to improve the quality of their lives. This connects well to the discussions under sub-section 1.2.1, which discussed that while 'community' in CE comprised of a diverse group; significant focus was on marginalized, under-resourced and deprived communities.

These findings cohere with the ideas and experiences documented by various CE scholars in the global literature. Service or community outreach broadly represent the initiatives undertaken by the academy to address community needs (Bringle and Hatcher 2002, cited in Sugawara *et al.* 2023: 5). Saidi and Boti (2023: 76) classified the myriad range of service activities under the broad categories of knowledge and technology transfer, continuing education, and social engagement. Doberneck, Glass and Schweitzer (2010, cited in Benneworth *et al.* 2018: 52), while providing the details of such activities; attributed publicly engaged service activities as including technical assistance, expert advice, clinical and diagnostic services, and other discipline related services. Here, Denny (2018: 7) noted that such community service, while resulting in social benefits; may or may not be related to an academic program and can take the form of co-curricular service and civic engagement, performed by students, faculty, staff. Mirroring similar thoughts, Snijder *et al.* (2023: 5) added that such forms of public engagement, in the form of service, include non-credit bearing, community-located initiatives.

Further, Farnell (2020: 40) asserted that such service activities may entail making university assets and services accessible for 'hard to reach' groups and making an 'intellectual contribution' as an expert towards advancing the civic life of the region.

Referring to department level services, Lee (2020: 1571) found that such activities are located within different departments such as law, medicine, public administration and social work. Here, the students may undertake various discipline-based service activities, like accounting students may organize tax workshops and similar initiatives (Lee 2020: 1571). Similar ideas were shared by Jadhav and Suhalka (2016: 22), who described the various civic engagement activities undertaken by academic departments, alone or in collaboration with CSOs and/or government institutions to nurture, develop and support the neighbouring communities.

***Sub-thematic section 3.3.2: Specific, targeted interventions in the community***

In addition to the generic service activities, interviews with academics revealed that the operationalization of CE in lieu of the service function, also included specific, targeted interventions in the community. These interventions were designed and executed for achieving tangible, qualitative changes, or to provide solutions to specific community issues, for addressing their immediate needs and easing their lives, by providing facilitated assistance and service. Broadly, two categories of such activities emerged:

The *first category* included action-based projects or task centred approaches, adopted by university departments or institutional structures, for providing immediate or short-term solutions to specific problems. This is elucidated in the following excerpts:

*"In communities...we come across different kinds of needs...then, after identifying those...we organize it priority wise...and we also see what resources are available, in the communities, and with us...then, the needs and the resources are matched and accordingly we select what we can work on...like, for example...there is a problem related to the lack of drinking water or there is a sanitation problem…so these issues...we deal with in an action project mode" [FM 19]*

*"We carry out different tasks in our adopted villages…like, in one of the village...we came across various ground water related problems, as this zone has a severe water scarcity problem, especially in the summer season…so in these cases...we conduct different activities...such as recharging of water pits, basic surveys to know more about the landscape and take actions accordingly....so civil engineering department is*

*directly engaged in such activities in our adopted villages and in nearby areas" [FM 10]*

*"DISHA is the pristine wing born out of our social outreach platform, Centre for Social Action (CSA), in our Kengeri Campus…it encourages the volunteers to apply their classroom knowledge of various disciplines towards solving socially relevant problems…these problems would be taken up as projects within the tenure of a semester...these can also be in the form of a research project of a social nature…and through these projects, students work towards a better tomorrow" [AL 7]*

The *second category* of activities involved the establishment of specific community structures (in the university and community), for providing specialized services, aimed at community benefit. Some of such insights are reflected in the following excerpts:

*"One of our focused intervention in the neighbouring villages of Kasanda, Kasandi, Gamdi, has been the establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)..we have also established Community Resource Centres (CRCs) in all our five adopted villages…it basically serves as an information centre for the community, where the students put up informative charts, pamphlets on government programs, schemes, policies, etc. ..and when the villagers need some information, they come there and the students counsel them" [FM 22]*

*"Under the School of Paramedical and Allied Health Sciences...we started a Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) in 2019, on the campus, for providing para-medical healthcare related services to the local community…like blood tests…and the services are offered at a subsidized rate...so, what it means is…you are providing subsidized services to the community at their doorstep…literally, as in case, anyone is not able to come to the CDC, the collection of blood samples is also organized at their homes" [AL 2]*

*"The School of Agriculture has formed a 'farmers society' for active communication between the farmers and the university...this paves way for a two-way communication, wherein the farmers have got a say in terms of communicating with the university and vice-versa, and they can speak directly to the concerned chair…like the dean…so this may be a kind of an institutionalization" [FM 1]*

These excerpts shed light on how universities are providing specific targeted services to the communities. However, five deeper observations emerge from the experiences shared. *Firstly*, not all issues in the communities can be resolved either by a generic approach; nor do they require elaborate research approaches. Some issues of immediate concerns can be solved through small action-based projects or task centred approaches (specific to the issue at hand). However, this requires judicious application of resources (available both within the community and in the university) and the knowledge of university stakeholders, to come up with feasible, quick, short-term but effective solutions. *Secondly*, similar to the previous section, such short-term targeted interventions can be taken up by different departments based on their expertise area. The example of the engagement efforts by civil engineering department and allied health sciences is important in light of unboxing of CE, from the social science framework, and exhibiting its applicability in other disciplines as well. In addition to departments, even social outreach structures at the university (having specific community service functions) can be engaged in such interventions, through either stand-alone approaches or linked to academic activities.

*Thirdly*, another way of achieving positive, tangible, and qualitative changes in the community is by way of establishing facilitative structures (either at the university level in case of CDC, or in the community, as in the case of CRC, or, farmers society). Notwithstanding its location, such structures provide essential, basic services to the community, which plays an important role in improving the quality of their day to day lives. *Fourthly*, such structures, symbolize a formal institutionalized arrangement between the university and the community, resulting in further consolidation and strengthening the relationships between the two. This then ensures the long-term sustainability of such partnerships, as such structures continue to function, despite changes in community or university's demographic structure. *Finally*, as these initiatives result in quick, tangible, and visible benefits, it further strengthens the civic sense and a notion of social responsibility in the faculty and students alike. This is important, as this is the core value which drives the spirit of any engaged intervention (curricular or extra-curricular).

These findings are also found to be consistent with the experiences documented in CE literature. Das and Bisht (2022: 12), through their study of CE at Indian HEI's from

the sustainable development perspective, pointed towards the 'direct action' model being implemented by HEI's for facilitating social change. This model involved specific engagements with the communities, that sought specific results, resulting in a tangible impact and can be implemented through various activities like volunteer activities, community outreach etc. (Das and Bisht 2022: 12). Further, Bhagwan, Naidu and Panwar (2022: 1125), through another study in the Indian context, shared about the creation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), to mobilize and empower women, socially, economically, politically, and to develop their confidence and entrepreneurial skills.

Similar ideas were shared by Jadhav and Suhalka (2016: 22) who mentioned activities such as the establishment of SHGs, youth groups, adolescent girl child development group, as important activities aimed at community development. Further, establishment of structures like community libraries or community centres, indicate dedicated mechanisms for providing services needed by different groups of communities, and in which the communities can be encouraged to participate to avail university's services (Jadhav and Suhalka 2016: 22; Rahman *et al.* 2019: 12; Panwar 2023: 221). Such interventions emerge as an important means for effecting impactful and dynamic actions on the ground, which can be demonstrated to the students, thereby developing social and civic responsibilities in them (Das and Bisht 2022: 12).

### *Sub-thematic section 3.3.3: Services offered through institutional structures/practices*

In addition to the knowledge sharing and specific targeted interventions undertaken by university departments, as part of the service function; interviews with academics at different universities revealed yet another dimension of service and engagement taking place at Indian HEI's. This dimension, which forms the core of this sub-section; focuses on the role of institutional platforms and structures, established at the university level, especially for fostering community outreach and contributing to local development. Such institutional entities fall into two main categories. The *first category* refers to the broad platform of the National Service Scheme (NSS), a central government program, mandating universities to engage in community service activities and programs, for providing a hands-on experience to the students and inculcation of social responsibilities in them. The *second category* refers to the activities carried out by exclusive institutional structures, entrusted with the similar

responsibility of community welfare. The activities and functional dimensions of both these entities are discussed below.

The following couple of excerpts share some of the participant reflections on the scale and impact of NSS programs towards achieving community welfare:

*"Under National Service Scheme...we work toward enhancing community awareness through campaigns on aspects like drug addiction, women empowerment, child rights, domestic violence, etc.…all of which are important social issues here...then we also spread awareness on health issues...we go the Anganwadi centres and assess the nutritional status of the children, in which students from all across the university are engaged...so there are a lot of mediums, through which directly engage with the communities...so, NSS can be used as a gateway for community engagement...and if both can be linked...many things can be done in a better way" [AL 18]*

*"Under the National Service Scheme (NSS)...we organize a free medical and multiskilling camp, every Sunday, for providing service to the local rural community in the university's vicinity...this camp has elements of healthcare, education, agriculture support, skill development, digital literacy etc…and all of university's departments are engaged in that" [AL 20]*

Further, the following few excerpts detail some of the diverse institutional community outreach structures established at various HEI's and their functional details:

*"We have this students forum…CSR, which is Culture, Sports and Responsibility...it is integrated in our academic structure...here, students have to spend 124 hours per year...it is a cosmopolitan group from several schools and conducts community sensitization programs…we also work on transfer of technologies, where the schools work together in collaboration...so it is an integrated system…like, if Agriculture or management students while working in the community, find that the community needs some technical assistance in farming…then engineering can chip in, and demonstrate the use of drones for spraying of fertilizers…so, everything converges for bettering the lives of the community" [FM 2]*

*"Directorate of Students Welfare (DSW) is our institutional structure for social outreach and works in areas of social upliftment, environmental conservation, social*

*awareness...it also organizes societal welfare programs, such as blood donation camps, plantation campaigns and awareness rallies at regular intervals to inculcate moral values in the students...the university has also adopted more than five nearby villages, where DSW works extensively" [AL 12]*

*"In 1999, the university thought that it should have a platform for providing students with a better opportunity for working with the community...under National Service Scheme (NSS), students just went to villages, did some extension activity and came back...but we wanted deeper community connections through a sustainable platform…so, Centre for Social Action (CSA) was established, replacing the NSS…CSA as a social organization links community partners and academic community and undertakes development projects in urban and rural communities. Every department has a representative in CSA, which adds to the institutionalization process. Also, from this year...we are planning to make it a credited program" [AL 7]*

These insights reveal key observations in the context of the operationalization of CE, within the service function at Indian HEI's. These can be unpacked under the following points: *Firstly*, in terms of government affiliated/recognized structures, NSS emerges as a huge platform for social outreach and community connect. As a government mandated scheme, NSS registers a strong presence at most universities, and is more pronounced, at government institutions. *Secondly*, with expansive connections in the community, NSS also provides a huge advantage in terms of access to communities. Further, being a university wide structure, it also enjoys a large human resource base, in terms of the vast number of students (from different disciplines), who are involved in several activities under its banner. These pointers become important when looked at from the CE perspective, as NSS can provide a valuable operational platform for effecting CE.

However, the *third* noteworthy aspect in this context, is the two limitations that NSS presents itself with. These are: firstly, activities performed under NSS mostly remain generic; and secondly, they fall outside the purview of the curriculum, with no links to students' academic learning. However, as shared by the second participant, and despite being extra-curricular, one university has made some innovative adaptations to the design of NSS programs. This involved curating an innovative multi-speciality medical camp, for achieving holistic local development, by integrating the expertise of

all academic departments, thereby fostering deeper, meaningful, and sustainable community relationships, rather than superficial activities.

*Fourthly*, and in addition to the NSS; the universities also have exclusive, institutional structures, mandated with the responsibility of community outreach and welfare. They take different forms, and are named differently, but all of them are united, by way of undertaking diverse activities in the community, for its general well-being. The *fifth* key observation is that, while most of such structures undertake mostly welfarist activities; some of them are now reinventing themselves to fill in the limitations of the NSS, from a CE perspective (as shared by the last participant). This is particularly true in the case of private universities who have relatively more flexibility in curating their programs, as compared to government institutions. For example, the inception of CSA itself was based on addressing the superficiality of NSS activities, and emerged as a platform to provide sustainable, deeper community connections. Also, lately, there have been attempts to bring the activities under such structure into the curricular domain (as in case of CSA). Interestingly, while this has been a hallmark of CSR since the beginning; DSW activities continues to remain extra-curricular.

The *final* noteworthy aspect here is that, when explored from the CE perspective; both the NSS and the institutional structures, offer advantages by way of having student representation from different disciplines across the institution. This, combined with the efforts to include it in the curriculum, has immense potential and promise for furthering the CE agenda, if guided with the right orientation. Further, it also emerged from the interviews that, as both platforms are institutionally recognized establishments, they enjoy wider visibility and acceptance across the institution, when compared to the recently established CBPR hubs, which remains boxed in certain departments who host it (as also referred to and mentioned earlier in the chapter).

Therefore, this section draws attention towards a very important and potential opportunity present in Indian HEI's, in the form of such platforms and structures, whose resources, connections and institution wide recognition can be used to further the cause of CE. However, to ensure that multiplicity of such entities (specially with new CE structures coming up in some universities), does not cause chaos and confusion, and dilute the engagement objective; it was strongly recommended by the participants, that these structures function in unison and cohesion to achieve the

shared goals of social development. This also connects well to the discussion under sub-section 2.2.2, which explored the importance of synergy between institutional structures, as a crucial determinant of the success of engagement interventions.

Exploring global literature related to these insights; Panwar (2020: 42) referred to how NSS continues to be the biggest institutional platform for community outreach at Indian HEI's, while also highlighting its limitation from a CE perspective, in it not being a part of academic learning. Nevertheless, NSS emerges as a major program at universities for fostering human development through community partnerships and varied interventions for addressing local social issues (Mohan and Bhushan 2017: 328). Further, in the context of institutional structures, its activities, and its advantages in terms of CE; Jose and Sahu (2023: 229), while documenting the CSA experience, shared about the institutional support it provided, to successfully conduct CE or service-learning programs, aided by its extensive collaborative network among local institutions. Similar ideas were shared by Kavatekar and Vijaya (2017a: 19), who documented the example of Enactus, a student social organization, at one of the Indian universities, which provided a platform to not only apply experiential learning in the field, but also work with the community for ensuring inclusive growth.

Therefore, considering the advantages offered by such platforms and structures, in terms of institutional support, access to communities and local networks, experiential learning opportunities, and the vast human resource advantage; Kavatekar and Vijaya (2017a: 19), argued in favour of HEI's to begin routing their engagement initiatives through such platforms and structures (like Enactus and NSS). However, from an engagement perspective, and for the activities to be valued academically, these activities should be structured in a way that it becomes a part of the curriculum (Kavatekar and Vijaya 2017a: 19).

### 4.3.4 Theme 4: Best practice models of CE in Indian HEI's

This chapter, till now, explored the various dimensions of the conceptualization of CE (Theme 1), its institutionalization (Theme 2) and its operationalization at the interface higher education functions (Theme 3), in line with the first three objectives of the study. The fourth theme, as detailed in the forthcoming section, addresses the fourth research objective of the study, by documenting the best practice models of CE at

Indian HEI's, in the form of short, crisp descriptions. These descriptions emerge as complementary to the discussions in the previous themes and provides a specific evidence base, with regards to some of the aspects, especially under the domains of institutionalization and operationalization of CE. Accordingly, this theme is categorized into two sub-themes. Further, to ensure a proportionate representation; the best practice models depicted, showcases the practices emerging from at least half of the HEI's selected for the study.

*(*These best practice descriptions emerged from various participant interviews, at different universities. However, for better understanding of the best practice models, the various excerpts have been brought together for a collated presentation, and described in passive voice).*

**Sub-theme 4.1: Best practices with respect to the institutionalization of CE**

The best practices listed under this sub-theme connects with the discussions under Theme 2, on the institutionalization of CE; in particular, the framing of CE aligned policies; establishment of CE structures; and the need for institutional structures to function in alignment, to effect successful CE. These practices refer to four universities included in the study sample (representing 50 percent of the total), which are numbered between 1-8 (reflecting the eight universities included in the study) for the sake of presenting the exclusivity of practices at different universities. These are presented in the following three sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 4.1.1: Engaged educational model, driven by CE aligned policies***

The community-immersed educative practice model at this university (number 8), is guided by its original philosophies, as promulgated by its founders, since 1915-16. However, the formal educational policy of the institute was officially adopted in 1975. The policy emerged as a beacon of disruptive innovation in higher education, which broadly aims at social welfare, driven by value-based education and educative practices, which focus on excellence with relevance. The policy envisages an action plan, which focuses on community involvement and engagement, with a spirit of selfless service for serving the last, least, lowest and the lost, and empowering the weaker sections, women and children, in particular. As a result, under this policy,

societal contribution and outreach forms an integral part of the institution's vision and strategic plans, and, therefore, forms a distinguishing feature of its educational framework. Guided by the policy, the latest institutional strategic plan also lays down a roadmap for the expansion, diversification, and intensification of the university's social outreach efforts from the local level to the global, in the next 15 years.

Consistent with this outlook, connecting with communities is integrated with the learning experience of the students, and is not any short-term welfare activity. Such an alignment with student's learnings is manifested in mainly two ways. While the indirect approach is to nurture well-rounded individuals as powerful agents of social change; the more direct approach comprises of social engagements in six key areas of sustainable living, which are: innovation, in terms of generation and use of renewable energy; water quality; air quality; education and health care; agriculture and dairy practices; and quality and values. At the core of all these activities, lies the institutional vision and commitment to make education relevant for real-life situations, thereby nurturing a sense of social sensibility and responsibility in all its faculty members and students. This includes developing the qualities of the head, heart, hand, and establishing synergistic and reciprocal relations between the faculty, students, and the communities.

With these values at its heart, the university also keeps reinventing itself, so that it is in coherence with the changing societal context and requirements. Accordingly, the university has now begun to remodel its educative practices around the triple tenets of: agro-ecology (concerning the primarily agrarian nature of Indian economy; with an eye on sustainability, social sensibility and innovation); consciousness studies (harnessing spiritual wisdom; focusing on quality and values, selfless service, and eco-friendliness) and entrepreneurship (integrated societal development through entrepreneurship education, focusing on self-sufficiency and minimalism). These initiatives bear testimony to the university's continuous and tireless efforts to connect academic knowledge with community welfare, for nurturing social change agents for the future, who can steer the process of sustainable social development. This has all been possible because of the guidance provided by its educational policy.

***Sub-thematic section 4.1.2: Establishment of a CE structure for managing CE practices***

This university (number 2) has established the Centre for Service Learning (CSL), as a formal academic body, for steering the integration of service-learning (SL) in various academic functions. The interesting aspect here was the organic evolution of CSL, as a structured academic body, from Centre for Social Action (CSA), which was a voluntary body, through an organized approach. Faculties engaged in CSA were introduced to the concept of SL through training workshops, and specific members, especially those who showed interest, were entrusted with the responsibility to study about SL and its practices in detail, and come up with an action plan for its institutionalization and implementation at the university. These faculty members, with support from the management, not only prepared an institutional policy on SL, but also played a key role in the establishment of CSL.

While the centre has an advisory committee constituting of institutional leadership; there is a dedicated team of six faculty members from different academic departments (such as management, engineering, commerce, etc.) and university campuses who oversee the centre's functions. The centre is guided by an exclusive institutional policy on SL, which not only provides a clear definition of the same; but also includes details on its operational modalities, to facilitate its implementation by various departments. The policy was drafted after an in-depth study of SL practices at various Asian universities, their understanding of SL, mode of institutionalization and after many iterations; an exclusive policy, suited in the context of the university was drafted and included as an official institutional policy document.

In terms of being the overseer of SL at the university, CSL is entrusted with the responsibility of assisting various academic departments in introducing SL courses in all undergraduate/post-graduate programs. This includes the design and development of SL curricula; organizing capacity building workshops to formally train faculty members and students both, in implementing CE programs; and reviewing the progress of SL integration by departments and providing them with necessary support, among others. An important aspect to note here is that despite the establishment of a central structure like CSL; its main agenda is to guide and support the faculties and departments and ensure the compliance with basic tenets of SL practices. The centre ensures that the departments have considerable autonomy and flexibility to implement SL as they deem to be the most fit, as per their departmental and disciplinary context.

***Sub-thematic section 4.1.3: Synergistic functioning between institutional structures, processes and functions, to enable CE***

The synergized approach to CE at this university (number 5) is a result of the coordinated functioning of different institutional structures, such as academic departments; research centres, including the UNESCO Chair on Women Empowerment and Gender Equality; and the parent organization of the university (Mata Amritanandmayi (MA) Math, which is also an international charitable organization). Further, community-based structures instituted by the MA Math like the AmritaSREE (Self Reliant Education and Employment), which represents a large community group, comprising of 13,000 Self-Help Groups, and having over 2 lakh members, comprising of men and women; also facilitates CE efforts at the university. All such institutional structures function in sync, with active sharing of knowledge, resources, and skills between them to achieve the shared community development objective. As a result, no community activity at the university is conducted in silo, but is connected to an array of structures, which work together. Further, the extensive inter-disciplinary activities aimed at promoting CE, emerges as another advantage, as it builds on the expertise, resources, and skills of different departments/disciplines, resulting in improved community development outcomes. Therefore, all such structures function in an interwoven and interlinked manner, providing an enabling ecosystem for CE implementation.

For instance, while technical support for academic departments is provided by research centres, by way of community engaged research opportunities for students; the students and the faculty actively contribute to the variety of field-based CE interventions undertaken by the research centres and the UNESCO Chair, as part of its diverse projects. Further, adoption of 101 villages across India (by the MA Math), gives the academics and researchers easy and quick access to diverse communities, belonging of different strata, across the length and breadth of the country. The active ongoing work with such communities in the villages, under the adopted villages program, proves to be a valuable aid for CE work, as the latter involves extensive efforts aimed at community rapport and relationship building, which in this case, is already facilitated at the field level. Further, the research centres at the university, in order to better implement its engagement activities; employs a diverse field team,

comprising of university employees, who frequently travel and live in the villages; and also, community members, who live in the villages. This further helps to ease the alienating perspective, which the community members usually harbour in their view of universities.

Therefore, looking at the system holistically - comprising of different channels for promoting CE, built on multi-stakeholder engagement and close alignment between the systems and infrastructure, coupled with a compassion driven approach for communities- it provides for a rich and connected ecosystem. This ecosystem paves the way for seamless integration of CE activities, as an integral part of university's structure and functioning.

**Sub-theme 4.2: Best practices with respect to operationalization of CE**

This sub-theme links to the discussions under Theme 3, and its 3 sub-themes, which explored the operationalization of CE at the interface of the higher education functions of teaching, research, and service, respectively. While some of the good practices were presented previously under Theme 3; a collection of best practice models under each of the functions, is illustrated as in the following sub-thematic sections:

***Sub-thematic section 4.2.1: CE in teaching: Nation-wide course on CE and Social Responsibility***

With policy support from the University Grants Commission (UGC), (under the broad framework of Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan (UBA), a central government program mandating universities to work for rural development; and in particular, its national curricular framework and guidelines for fostering CE and social responsibility at Indian HEI's, which recommends the introduction of a CE course at all Indian HEI's); this university (number 8) has designed and developed a 2 credit (1 credit for theory and 1 credit for field work) course on CE and social responsibility. This course has been launched by the UGC as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on its SWAYAM platform. SWAYAM is a digital learning portal, established by the Government of India, which offers UGC recognized online courses, to promote multi-disciplinary learning and makes the best T-L resources available, even to the marginalized and disadvantaged learners.

With particular focus on rural CE, the course seeks to promote multi-dimensional rural development, by placing special emphasis on aspects like literacy, employment, health and well-being, and vibrant functioning of local rural institutions like the Self-Help Groups (SHGs). An essential tenet of this course, is tapping the traditional knowledge possessed by rural communities, acquired as a result of their practical lived experience, and those which have been transferred to them by their ancestors. The course places equal emphasis on leveraging this knowledge resource of the communities and accords it as being critically important, in achieving the overall goals of sustainable community development. Further, as a course offered at the national level and open to all students across all universities; this university, in its capacity as the host university, is also entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the credit transfer for the students from different universities, who opt for this course, as per the UGC SWAYAM Regulations, 2021.

The course has been designed as a 10-week long program, comprising of 10 modules, with 1 module allocated for every week under the study period. These modules focus on various aspects such as the concepts of CE; dimensions of rural community and villages, with reference to the development programs; rural institutions and local administration; CE programs and their evaluation, etc. Consistent with the credits allocated for classroom and field hours under the course; 1 hour of online module classes is supplemented with 3 hours or field work, including 5 assignments. This course has emerged as a novel initiative in the context of Indian HEI's, and can play an important role in popularizing, facilitating, and institutionalizing the practice of CE in the years to come.

***Sub-thematic section 4.2.2: CE in research: Live-in-Labs program***

Live-in-Labs (LiL) is a multidisciplinary experiential learning program, built on tenets of engaged research and rests on the four pillars of experiencing, embracing, engaging, and empowering. It was introduced into the academic curriculum of the university (number 5) in 2017, and is offered as a credit course across all the schools, including engineering, business, biotechnology and management. The courses under LiL (LiL 1, 2, 3 and 4) are offered at all levels of study. While it is mandatory for PhD and Masters' students, it is offered as an elective course for bachelor's students. The main purpose of the program is to use academic knowledge and resources to address

pressing rural challenges in the community, in diverse areas (such as water and sanitation, health and hygiene, education and gender equality, waste/energy management, disaster resilience) and design sustainable solutions for the latter. The basic tenets of the program include understanding a problem; its deep-routed causes, using a systems approach; and devising a workable/practical and sustainable solution, using a participatory approach (in line with the community requirements) which can be owned and managed by the communities themselves.

To achieve these objectives, students work in multi-disciplinary groups under the program which is implemented on a phased basis and through a structured research process, over the period of one year. While 3 phases happen on campus; 3 phases take place during active engagement with communities in the villages, with every phase alternating with the other. The *first in-campus phase* includes training the students via structured workshops, where the students are trained in engaged research approaches like methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Human Centric Design (HCD), etc., which also involves unlearning of traditional concepts and acquiring new learnings with respect to working with the community. This is followed by the *second phase*, which involves travel to the villages, and staying there for about 10 days for understanding the village life and its broader context (including the social life; economic structure, resource availability) and identifying the challenges, while using tools like HCD and PRA. This stage concludes with joint identification of the problem which happens in collaboration with the communities. The *third phase* involves travelling back to the campus; where, based on the problems identified, base propositions are developed, duly supported with an exhaustive literature review.

The *fourth phase* involves work carried out again in villages, which involves co-designing solutions, in collaboration with the communities. This co-ideation of solution involves extensive discussion and deliberation sessions with the community members. The *fifth stage*, which happens on campus, then focuses on the development and testing of prototype or model solutions, as co-designed with communities in the previous phase. This is done under guidance of expert faculty members. Finally, the *last phase* involves the testing and implementation of prototype or solutions in the field, and training the communities in case of technical solutions, so that the solution or the

product is co-owned and managed by them, keeping the long-term sustainability of the solution in mind.

At present, LiL has nearly 80 live projects across India, starting from the states of Jammu in the north, to Tamil Nadu in the south; and from Gujarat in the west, to West Bengal and Sikkim in the east. Further, the work is being carried out in collaboration with communities in all the 101 villages that have been adopted by the university. Therefore, LiL presents as an exclusive CE model and represents a kind of a triad of engaged teaching, engaged research, and engaged service practices.

***Sub-thematic section 4.2.3: CE in service: Establishment of social enterprises***

In the sphere of education and entrepreneurship, whether it is the application of disruptive technologies for the betterment of society or engaging with the wisdom of indigenous people for a holistic understanding of our ecosystems; this university (number 1) has established exclusive Social Enterprises (SEs) going by the generic name of Gram Tarang (GT), and Urban Micro Business Centre (UMBC). These SEs function as vehicles that drive the local economy, while also demonstrating the difference and impact a university can make, in the lives of the local community in particular, and the society at large.

Gram Tarang, established in 2010, as a partnership between National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the university; has evolved into a unique model that blends Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) qualifications with skill development. The intent is to ensure that each skill program equips rural youth with specific technical skills and competencies along with the necessary life skills to ensure a seamless transition into the modern workplace. GT entities are social entrepreneurial outreach structures, incubated in largely underdeveloped regions of the country for solving the problems of skilling at the bottom of the pyramid (GT Employability Training Services); providing financial and banking services to unbanked villages (GT Inclusive Development Services); manufacturing, design, and engineering services (GT Technologies); and in aspects related to agriculture and production of farm products (GT Foods).

Further, UMBC focuses on developing nano/mini/micro entrepreneurship opportunities among the urban poor, resulting in the creation of livelihood opportunities

aligned with community needs. UMBC presents the institutionalization of a socially disruptive innovation in the urban slum space, for improving the quality of lives of the marginalized and deprived communities. At the same time, it provides support services to women and children, so that they may pursue a career, leading to an improved quality of life for members of the community. UMBC is set up with the goals of establishing entrepreneurships (start-ups) which are self-sufficient, sustainable, and scalable. The vision is to establish a sustainable, and economically viable micro-enterprise ecosystem in every urban 'slum' cluster that nurtures successful urban poor entrepreneurs-particularly women.

Another important aspect of these SEs is that the trajectories and relationship between these SEs and the university are intricately intertwined. Here, while the university functions as the knowledge and technology provider to these SEs; the latter functions as the skills provider, for achieving holistic social development, through education, employment, and entrepreneurship. Therefore, both entities work in sync, in an interwoven and interlinked manner, forming a vibrant ecosystem.

## 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the emergent findings from the study and a critical analysis for same. In doing so, a total of 4 themes, 10 sub-themes and 36 sub-thematic sections were presented, which addressed the first four research objectives of the study in detail. The next chapter (Chapter 5), will present the framework which was developed, utilizing the study's findings for guiding and strengthening CE at Indian HEI's (as per the study's last objective), along with providing a summation of the findings and proposed recommendations.

# CHAPTER FIVE:
# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a reflection on the study conducted, along with directions on moving forward towards exploring the concept of CE, in a more nuanced manner, in the Indian higher education arena. In doing so, the chapter, as it recapitulates the aims and objectives of the study; while presenting a broad overview of the emergent findings and recommendations, in relation to each of the study's objectives (section 5.2). Additionally, the chapter also provides a note on the limitations of the study (section 5.3), while outlining specific pointers as recommendations for future research in the field of CE at Indian HEI's (section 5.4). The chapter closes with a concluding section as presented in section 5.5.

In essence, the study aimed at exploring and understanding the current practice of CE at Indian HEI's, and to present a framework for strengthening this area of work. This aim of the study was achieved through conducting an exploratory and in-depth qualitative study, at eight best practice universities. Here, various academics (belonging to the two study samples of university leadership and faculty members, respectively), were interviewed at each university, to gain insights, with respect to study's outlined objectives, which were:

1. To understand how CE is conceptualized at HEI's in India.
2. To enquire about how CE may be institutionalized at HEI's in India.
3. To explore how CE is being operationalized within the context of its integration in teaching, research and service.
4. To document the varied and best practice models/adaptations of CE at Indian HEI's.
5. To develop a framework which outlines strategies that may guide and strengthen the practice of CE in India.

The data presented in Chapter four provided a detailed sketch of the findings emerging from the first four objectives as listed above. This was presented under 4 themes, 10 sub-themes and 36 sub-thematic sections. This thematic analysis provided salient

information to guide, inform and strengthen the practice of CE at Indian HEI's in the future. This information was therefore, consolidated and carefully crafted into developing a framework for guiding CE at Indian HEI's, which is presented as a schematic diagram (as in Fig 5.1) in the chapter. This also addressed the fifth and final objective of the study, as stated above. The broad findings and recommendations emerging from the first four objectives and detailed explanation and associated recommendations emerging from the schematic framework (in line with the fifth research objective), is presented in the following section.

## 5.2 Major findings and recommendations

The following discussion presents a broad overview of the emergent findings and recommendations, in line with the presentations made in the preceding Chapter four.

### 5.2.1 Conceptualization of community engagement

The data revealed that the conceptualization of CE at most Indian HEI's stems from a basic philosophical premise or orientation that the universe functions on interconnections and intertwined relationships between its various elements. As a result of these interconnections, humanity and human existence are impacted by each other's actions, and therefore, one has a responsibility towards the other. As per the data; this belief system at HEI's reflects back into its educative practices, which is then moulded in a way to achieve the dual objectives of social development and academic learning. This forms the essence, from where the spirit of CE originates. Further, in line with the idea of shared goals of sustainable social development; all CE activities and interventions are guided by the values of service, care, compassion, respect, responsibility, inclusivity, and ethics. These aspects also link CE to the broad mandate of social responsibility in higher education, an area which has gained immense traction in academic circles lately, especially amidst the growing social challenges.

Further, the understanding of CE at Indian HEI's is also directly linked to the understanding of its key constituent concepts, and how they are inter-connected with each other. The basic concepts, as evident in the term itself, emerged to be 'community' and 'engagement'. The data showed that the term 'community' in the Indian context, represented a diverse and heterogenous group, comprising of external

communities like local rural populations, urban slum communities, tribal/ethnic communities, specific farming communities, etc. However, despite the diversity, the dominant communities with whom CE interventions were primarily carried out, belonged to the marginalized, deprived and impoverished group. Considering these aspects, the importance of clearly identifying and defining the target community emerged as a critical factor for successful CE interventions, as per the data. Further, the term 'engagement' in the Indian context is used for achieving two specific objectives under the banner of holistic social transformation; *firstly*, for addressing pressing social challenges and providing a sustainable solution for same; and *secondly*, for building community capacities for enhancing their empowerment and self-reliance. However, from the lens of CE, both the objectives were achieved by the judicious application of university's knowledge, skill, expertise, and resources. This also provided the intrinsic link between CE and university's functions, for achieving the broad goals of impactful social change. It was also found that at different HEI's, CE is being practiced under the garb of varying and diverse engagement practices such as service-learning, Community Based Participatory Research, compassion driven research, or even a combination of different approaches. However, regardless of the approach used, it was mainly in response to addressing the varied needs of diverse communities. Therefore, the CE interventions were especially tailored around the broad context and specific needs of the communities, co-identified by the communities and the HEI's.

The data also revealed that the conceptualization of CE, was built on established processes and principles, comprising of foundational elements. Among these processes, the most significant one was the establishment of collaborative relationships with diverse community stakeholders. Such partnerships involved working 'with' communities to co-create new knowledge, which was considered as instrumental in achieving the desired and shared goals of social transformation. Further, such CE partnerships are weaved into an ecosystem, where communities, academics, NGOs, governments, and also multi-lateral organizations come together and work as partners in a dialogic, collaborative, participatory manner. However, the success of such multi-stakeholder partnerships in bringing about social change in a collective manner, is dependent on how well the basic partnership principles of

respect, shared authority and equality is adhered to, in the whole process, where the contribution of each partner is not only acknowledged, but also valued.

Another dimension of such partnerships, that the data reflected on, was the derivation of mutual benefits and reciprocal outcomes in the process, based on the aspect of co-learning between the partners. This particularly focused on how the university and the community stakeholders could learn from each other, while working in collaboration. While the academics gained from the traditional knowledge systems of the communities; the communities on the other hand, gained from the technical expertise of the universities, while also securing a valued partner in their social development process. Further, another significant element as recognized in the data was the establishment of monitoring mechanisms, for ensuring smooth implementation and integration of CE. Such mechanisms were required to be put in place, both at the CE design and implementation stages. This was considered important not only in terms of tracking the progress of the process, but also deriving learnings, adopting course corrections, and also gauging the effectiveness of the activities in being able to achieve the objectives laid out in the design stage.

Considering the above findings, the following recommendations can be collated which can guide the practice of CE at Indian HEI's in future:

- The core value framework of the institution has an important role to play in how CE is envisioned and conceptualized at HEI's. As a result, this serves as a good starting point for situating CE in the institutional rubric.
- Additionally, there is also a need to clearly define the 'what' and 'how' of CE. Clarity on these aspects ensures the successful outcome of CE interventions in the field; and in the absence of which, there is a risk of CE ideas getting diluted into the generic notion of outreach and extension.
- In this context, it is also important to align with the values driving and the principles underlying the CE process as a whole, to ensure that it is practiced in its true spirit. Having checks and balances in this regard, in the form of monitoring mechanisms, proves to be an added incentive.

### 5.2.2 Institutionalization of community engagement

With respect to institutionalization of CE at Indian HEI's, the data revealed mainly two aspects which were put forth as recommendations in this regard. While the first was engraining CE as part of institutional culture; the second aspect focused on developing supporting systems, to facilitate the embedment of CE into the institutional structure. With respect to the former, the data reflected on specific action pointers to be taken by the university, as a collective. Amongst these, the first thing which emerged was the framing of an institutional policy, which can provide the requisite mandate, systematize, and guide the implementation of CE at the institution, Further, this policy needs to be duly supported by the crafting of articulate and strategic CE plans. These plans, in addition to providing hand-holding support for CE and clear definitions for CE related concepts; should also be aligned to the institutional mission and vision, and allow for flexibility for tailoring/tweaking CE implementation at the department level, by the CE course instructor. Such a provision can ensure that while the broad CE mandate can guide the action, the actual implementation can be contextualized, to best suit the departmental or disciplinary learning structures.

Consistent with these ideas, the data also noted that the institutionalization of CE cannot be ensured by any singular effort along one tangent; but is the result of convergence of top-down and bottom-up efforts, in a way that there is co-ownership of ideas by all stakeholders, who are given equal stakes in the process. Any unbalance here, may result in either the efforts not sustaining in the long run, due to the lack of acceptance or uptake; or may run the risk of isolation and fragmentation, resulting in the desired objectives not being met. Another important aspect in this context, and as reflected in the data, was that the cultural embedment of CE as part of its institutionalization will remain incomplete unless CE is practically linked to the academic learning of students, involving due award of credits, and also making it a criterion for graduation. This was found to be essential to dispel the notion of CE being an 'add-on/siloed/or a piecemeal' activity; by making it a central, integral academic practice, on par with other academic functions like teaching and research. Further, such embedment into the academic structure and learning, needs to span across various departments and disciplines at the university. This can ensure that CE is not viewed as a particular department or discipline's prerogative alone, but as a collective

effort undertaken by different departments in a synergistic manner. This synergy for CE implementation by different disciplines will not only result in effective CE practice and institutionalization; but also serve as a platform where lessons learnt can be shared for mutual and overall benefits.

In terms of the second aspect under CE institutionalization, which focuses on developing systems and infrastructure to make CE a part of institutional fabric and structure; the data showed that only provisioning CE policies, strategic plans, or other mandates in this regard may not be adequate. This needs to be supplemented with multiple efforts that need to be taken at an institutional level, to create a collective vision of CE, which all institutional stakeholders can pursue, collectively. Amongst such efforts, the first and foremost, as revealed by the data was the conduction of specialized training programs for faculty members and students, aimed at developing a common understanding of CE, along with building necessary skills and competencies related to same. This was considered as important, in light of the low level of understanding of CE, that both stakeholders presented themselves with. This was attributed to either the lack of initial orientation in their academic journey or different disciplinary backgrounds, which did not provide for such an opportunity.

As the understanding on CE builds, further systematization of CE involves establishment of exclusive, centralized structures for managing and coordinating CE across the institution. However, given the Indian experiences where some of such structures faced limitations in terms of visibility and support; the data shed light on some important aspects in this regard. It revealed that while establishing such structures, it needs to be ensured that they are placed on par with other institutionally prioritized structures such as research centres, and functions in sync with them. Having sustainability plans in place, for ensuring its continued and effective functioning is an added advantage. From the data, it was also learnt that trained, experienced and passionate staff needed to be recruited into these CE structures, who can drive the CE process and provide necessary support, as and where needed. However, equally essential was balancing the academic workload of such staff, so that they can take out time for CE and do justice to CE related responsibilities.

In addition to this, there also emerged the need for further incentivization of not only the CE centre staff, but also other faculty members and students involved in CE efforts.

This was considered as important to sustain their momentum in an academic environment where they are faced with competing demands from other tasks and responsibilities. Such incentives can take the form of award of academic credits for the students, and reward, recognitions or inclusion of CE in the performance assessment criteria, for staff for their engagement in CE related work. This was considered as essential to not only institutionalize the process, but also create the drive within the faculty and students, so that they engage in CE willingly. Further, when such engagement pays them dividends and recognition on par with other academic activities, they approach CE with the same respect and passion, as any other teaching or research related activity.

Another important dimension in this regard was making available timely administrative support, in terms of approvals for field work, dedicated financial allocations for aiding the latter and related activities, and logistics support. As these aspects form an integral core of CE activities, timely and efficient support on these fronts, not only smoothens the implementation of CE, but can also be considered an important indicator of institutionalization of the same. Gradually, as CE gains a stronghold in the institutional processes and its practices gain momentum in the field; the data further called for the establishment of knowledge sharing platforms, that will enable the learning of shared lessons between CE scholars within and beyond the institution, at the national and the international level. This was seen as a major enabler for deepening and strengthening the institutional practice of CE in the future.

Building on these insights and learnings, as revealed in the dataset; the following recommendations can be shared, with respect to the institutionalization of CE:

- Institutionalizing CE at HEI's demands multiple efforts to be taken across different procedural tangents, involving all the stakeholders at an institution. The idea here is to enable the collective mobilization of resources (human, physical, financial, infrastructural), and direct it towards the achievement of a shared vision of pursuing CE with passion.
- Framing of CE policies, crafting of plans and embedding CE across curriculum and disciplines, needs to be complemented with building a supportive ecosystem, comprising of facilitative processes, functions and infrastructure. Further, establishing mechanisms to systematize, popularize and incentivize

CE can effectively make it a part of institutional fabric. This can ensure that CE is situated as a central academic practice, and can warrant the sustainability of its practices in the years to come; notwithstanding changes in personnel, priorities or any other structural or functional changes in the institution.

- Along with these efforts, and most importantly; institutionalization of CE at an HEI calls for a transformative change in the culture and mindset of the institution and its constituent stakeholders. Therefore, what is needed is commitment and willingness, on the part of the institution and its stakeholders to embrace CE and its non-conventional practices, as an integral part of the academic discourse.

### 5.2.3 Operationalization of community engagement at the interface of teaching, research and service function

With respect to the third research objective of the study regarding the operationalization of CE at the interface of the teaching, research, and service functions of higher education; the data gathered from the study shed light on some of the unique practices adopted by Indian HEI's, in order to embed CE into the realm of its core functions. A broad overview of the findings in terms of all the three functions is described as below:

CE at the interface of the teaching function

With respect to teaching, the data revealed a diversity of specialized and exclusive CE based courses, that were introduced by different HEI's. While some of such courses were embedded within the traditionally taught subjects; others had a more exclusive positioning in terms of either focusing directly on the study or practice of CE; or aimed at building an orientation for the same. Notwithstanding the nature of the course, the data found that most of such courses were linked to academic credits and included a balance between theory and field component, thereby provisioning for active engagement with the community, including a dynamic reflective learning component. In addition to new courses, other efforts by institutions to embed CE in the teaching function, as evidenced in the data; included integrating CE in the curriculum, course design and learning outcomes of the existing courses. Such efforts mostly revolved

around linking CE to the disciplinary context; provisioning for a holistic, rather than a stop-gap CE embedment, and dynamic curricular revision to make room for the same.

In addition to courses, the data revealed that institutions also adopted several engaged pedagogies in their teaching-learning processes; in an attempt to make it more community engaged and contextually relevant. Some of such creative and innovative pedagogical techniques included the adoption of experiential, applied, or problem-based learning across disciplines; Participatory Learning & Action (PLA); story telling; human centred design; and arts-based approaches. Such pedagogies not only facilitated deeper connection with communities, but also enabled co-learning (an important tenet of the CE process, as also described in the section on the conceptualization of CE). This further contributed towards enriching the learning outcomes of the students, both in the classroom and in the field.

CE at the interface of the research function

Under the framework of the research function, the data reflected on specific references to Community Engaged Research (CER) and applied research; as being practiced in the context of Indian HEI's. In terms of CER, the data found that in most cases, the research topic emanated from the needs of the local communities (much in line with CE being driven by local community needs, as mentioned earlier). Further, such approaches involved universities working in collaboration with communities, to achieve the overarching objective of social welfare. It also emerged from the data that while such CER approaches are being practiced under different nomenclatures of Compassion Driven Research (CDR), Community Partnership Research (CPR), Community Based Research (CBR); Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) emerged as a dominant practice among them.

However, notwithstanding the terminology used, all such CER approaches were weaved around certain core components. These were: a structural, phased approach, involving balance between learning, reflection, and action; use of creative modes of enquiry/data collection, and arts-based methods in particular; focus on co-creation of knowledge with the communities; and, public sharing of findings, thereby making the communities, co-owners of the research findings. These aspects provided points of stark differentiation, when compared to the traditional research approaches. Guided

by the broad mandate of social action and social change; CER approaches - built on collaborative partnerships and co- ownership of ideas, interventions, and solutions - emerged as a valuable platform for effecting positive change in diverse areas of social development like health, education, livelihoods etc.

The data also revealed significant insights on CBPR, which appeared to be gaining steady ground as a prominent CER approach in the Indian context. Steered by CBPR hubs; the practice, as evidenced in the data, is being popularized through the means of CBPR courses and CBPR projects. The courses, offered as elective courses to students from across different disciplines, aimed at developing the student's understanding and competencies in this field of engaged research. The projects, on the other hand; represented exclusive initiatives by CBPR trained faculty, undertaken with support from external partners, and which built on the same core components of CER processes, as referred to in the preceding paragraph.

CE at the interface of the service function

In lieu of the service function; the data revealed a variety of efforts being undertaken by HEI's to embed CE. Amongst the widely practiced initiatives were, generic knowledge sharing with the community, done through the medium of diverse community centric activities undertaken by diverse departments in areas such as education, water and sanitation, women empowerment etc, However, while such activities were guided by an overall social development objective, they mostly fell outside the purview of curriculum and credits, barring disciplines like agriculture, social work and education, whose curriculum mandated such efforts. In addition to general knowledge sharing, the data also found interventions which were specifically designed and executed in a way to achieve targeted and tangible qualitative changes in the community, or for providing solutions to specific community issues. These were mainly achieved through adopting task centred approaches or undertaking short-term action-based projects in the community, which were either stand-alone initiatives or linked to the curriculum. One of the important outputs of such specific interventions included establishment of facilitative structures, either at the university level or at the community level, for providing basic, essential services in the community. This also contributed strongly towards institutionalizing community-university relationships, thereby leading

to its sustainability in the long run. These emerged to be exclusive ways in which universities sought to embed CE into the service function.

Further, in this context, the data also provided insights on the ways in which some form or degree of CE was approached by the HEI's through established institutional practices and structures. The NSS, a central government program, operational in most universities emerged as a major institutional practice in this regard. As part of this program, students from across the university, engaged in community service activities, aimed at providing them with a hands-on practical experience, along with the inculcation of social responsibilities in them. Institutional structures on the other hand; established with the mandate of outreach, extension, and local community development, also enjoyed institution wide visibility, participation from different departments, and a strong leadership support. Under such structures also, students engaged in a wide variety of community development activities. However, both (NSS and structures), primarily fell outside the curricular purview, with the activities undertaken being more of a generic nature. Despite this reality, the data evidenced that if such gaps can be filled (specially with respect to CE orientation and curricular connection); both these platforms could emerge as valuable means for pursuing CE, given their wide reach, resources and connections within the institution, and outside in the community.

Building on these insights; the following recommendations can be proposed:

- As evidenced in the data and as described in the preceding sections, embedment of CE into the higher education functions of teaching, research and service, does not entail doing something very different; but only approaching the routine functions, differently. Therefore, by incorporating some tweaks and improvisations, HEI's can make their traditional functions move out from their ivory towers and become more community-engaged and contextually relevant.
- While the teaching function should focus on 'engaged learning', one which is widespread enough to be able to assess its social connections and ramifications; the research function, in addition to knowledge enhancement, should focus on the discovery of knowledge in a way, that it can contribute to social action and social change. The service function, on the other hand, should be devised in a way which inculcates an empathetic and responsible citizenship

approach in students, rather than a charitable perspective. If these aspects can be considered while designing and carrying out the higher education functions, then both academic objectives and social development outcomes can be achieved in effective and meaningful ways.

- Finally, to do the above; a lot of opportunities, resources and platforms already exist in the Indian higher education framework. What is required, is to leverage such opportunities in an appropriate manner, to create transformative educative practices at present, and a socially responsible higher education in the future.

### 5.2.4 Best practice community engagement models

The emergent data from the study, while addressing the fourth research objective on the best practice CE models in Indian HEI's, shed light on some innovative approaches on CE, adopted by the latter. These practices, by nature of their exclusivity, impact within the institution and in the community, and easy replication potential, deserved a separate mention. As evidenced in the data, such practices, while being diverse in nature; represented an assorted mix of transformative educational models, structures, process and practices. This provided evidence of some of the best practices emerging from Indian HEI's, especially in terms of institutionalization of CE and its operationalization at the interface of the academic functions of teaching, research, and service. Doing so, the best practice models also reflected on the various dimensions that need to be considered while devising, designing, and implementing CE practices.

The first set of best practices, with respect to the institutionalization of CE, portrayed how institutional policies, structures and processes facilitated the former. While general institutional philosophies have a key role in shaping up engaged educative practices; exclusive policies on CE, provides validation and credibility to the practice. This not only results in the widespread uptake by institutional stakeholders, but also ensures its sustainability in the long run. In the process, these aspects also contribute towards conceptualizing and internalizing the idea of CE, as part of the educational framework. Further, another institutional best practice also demonstrated, how such philosophies, polices and mandates can be supported by establishing facilitative mechanisms and structures, which can further aid CE systematization. The last institutional best practice in this context, illustrated the value and importance of different institutional structures, processes and functions working in sync to achieve

the broad engagement objectives. This resulted in collectivizing differential energies and channelling them in the direction of achieving the shared vision of CE. This assumed special importance, as the absence of the same synergy at other HEI's, was seen to present major challenges, both in terms of institutionalization and the practice of CE.

The next set of best practices, focused on the actual operationalization of CE at the interface of the teaching, research and service functions of higher education. This also indicated that the CE loop, which may begin at the top level in the institution, or at the behest of the leadership; ends with actual practices being undertaken at the departmental level. Consistent with the ideas proposed in the preceding section, the best practices also emerged as a testament to how an engaged approach to teaching, research, and service, can make it more relevant, responsive and responsible. Finally, considering how such practices have emerged as hallmarks of institutional reputation in the society; the discussion circles back to the aspect of mutuality of benefits, and how CE emerges as a win-win proposition for all stakeholders.

Building on these lessons, the following recommendations can be listed:

- Firstly, consistent with the notion that change begins within; an institution, as a first and foremost requirement, needs to introspect on its values, strengths, and practices. This is because an institutional best practice is nothing but a symbol of collective vision, which transpires into its activities and functions. Therefore, in terms of CE, an institution needs to synergize its resources and energies towards achieving an engaged vision, in all aspects of its work and functions. A creative and innovative approach to such a vision, results in curating effective, impactful, and transformative CE best practices.
- The second dimension of effecting change is, to begin at the local level and in the neighbourhoods. Therefore, institutions need to focus on the context and needs of its immediate communities and devise interventions to address the latter's concerns, within the academic framework. Such efforts, in due process, yield visible gains and impacts of scale; and,
- Finally, such practices and approaches need to be pursued diligently, committedly and with passion, over a sustained period of time. Only then can a successful outcome emerge, which can be worthy of being designated a best

practice model; and one which can position an HEI as a ‘socially responsible’ societal institution.

### 5.2.5 Development of a framework, outlining strategies for guiding and strengthening the practice of CE at Indian HEI’s

The data emerging from the study (from the first four objectives in particular), provided salient insights and information to guide and strengthen the practice of CE, at Indian HEI’s, which was also the fifth and final objective of the study. Accordingly, the relevant lessons and learnings accrued from the data, were put together to build a schematic framework. This framework provides practical insights on devising, designing, and implementing CE in Indian HEI’s. Guided by the national higher education policy landscape, and with the ultimate objective to produce a socially responsible HEI; the core of the framework builds on the institutional processes, which have implications on the practice of CE. Accordingly, this core focuses on the interplay between higher education leadership and personnel (faculty member and students) and by situating them amidst institutional structures and functions; the framework sheds light on the dynamics involved in the process, which has a key role to play in effecting successful CE at the institution. This framework is presented as in Fig 5.1 and its detailed explanation follows subsequently.

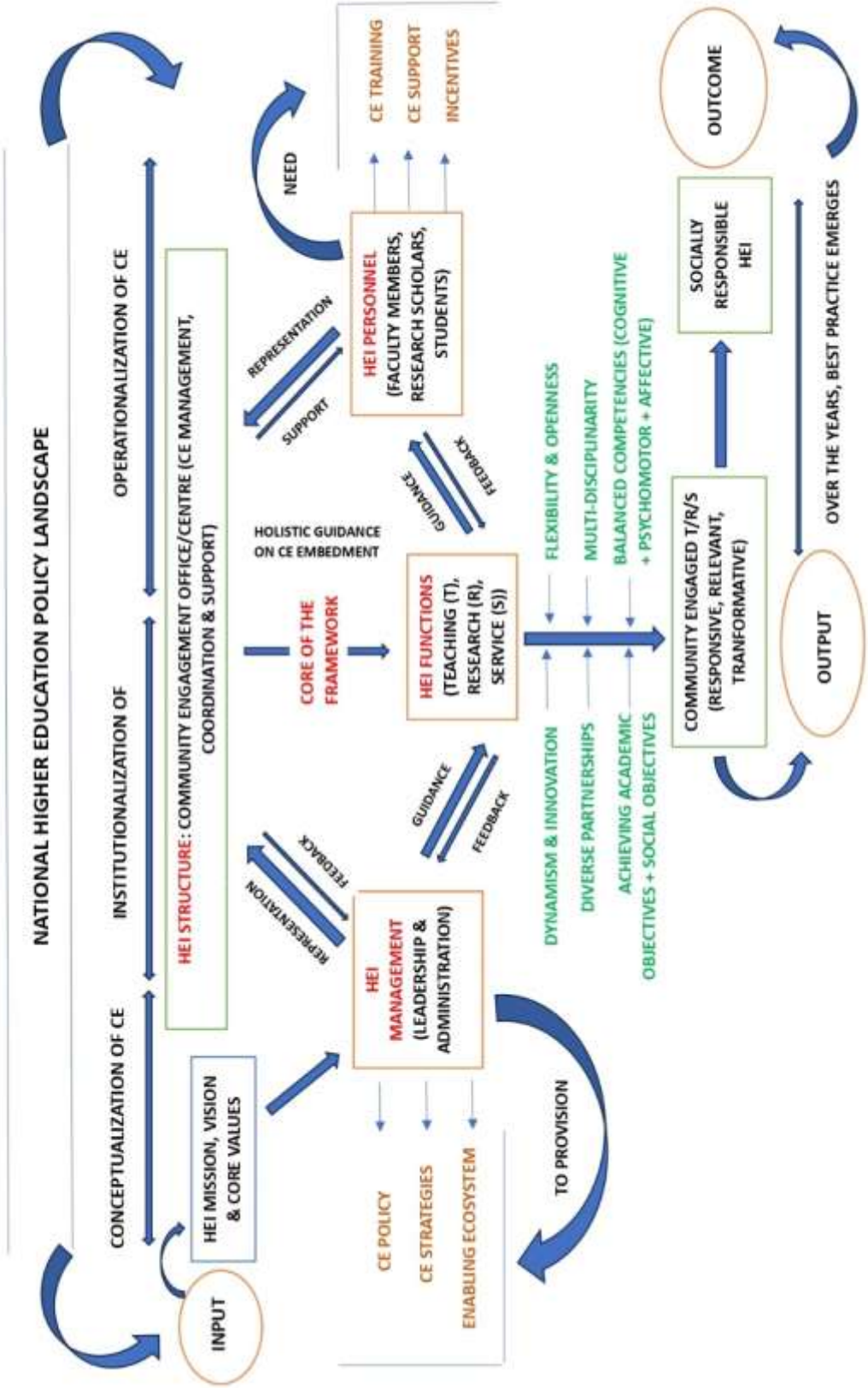


Figure 5.1: Schematic framework for guiding and strengthening CE at Indian HEI's

As mentioned earlier, the schematic framework can be seen as broadly comprising of the following three components:

1) Overarching and guiding mandate, provided by the national higher education policy landscape.
2) Core of the framework, comprising of institutional personnel, structures, and functions, and,
3) Outcome, in the form of a socially responsible HEI, as emerging from the whole architecture.

These are explained in further detail as follows:

**1) Overarching mandate: National higher education policy landscape**

National higher education policies in any country have an important role to play in shaping and guiding the higher education sector. Similarly, in the Indian scenario, the overarching mandate, as prescribed by the higher education regulatory agencies and associated policies framed, have a significant impact on the practices and processes at HEI's. In the context of CE, a policy push in the recent times came through the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (launched by the Ministry of Education) and the Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan (UBA) 2.0, which a flagship program of the Ministry of Education, Government of India (MHRD 2018: 1; 2020: 34). While NEP provides an overarching mandate with respect to CE; UBA 2.0 mandates HEI's to work closely with communities, especially rural communities, for achieving social transformation by leveraging the technical knowledge, resources, and expertise of HEI's. Doing so, it has contributed in a significant way towards initiating and building the CE movement in India. As a result, most of the community outreach at most of the Indian universities, is being conducted under the UBA banner.

Further, as part of the program, the UGC has also drafted the national curricular guidelines for fostering social responsibility and community engagement in Indian HEI's, which mandates the introduction of CE courses in universities (UGC 2020: 9). This, coupled with national training programs for university faculties on CBPR (facilitated by UGC), has resulted in a significant momentum shift in favour of engaged practices, which has further popularized such practices in Indian HEI's (Press Information Bureau 2022: para. 1 line 1). Therefore, any framework for strengthening

CE, will be incomplete without acknowledging the contribution made by the national higher education policy environment. Taking cognizance of this, this framework too, is guided by this mandate, which then trickles down to institutional processes and practices, as described in the following section.

### 2) Core of the framework: Dynamic interplay between institutional personnel, structures, and functions

A HEI is a vast institution, with multiple responsibilities entrusted with several stakeholders, to be carried out within the ambit of institutional structure and functions. Therefore, for any practice like CE to be situated in the midst of this system, requires efforts along multiple tangents, not in exclusion; but, in a simultaneous and synergized manner, building on a dynamic to-and-fro process of active guidance and feedback. Drawing on this aspect, the framework at its core, situates the process of dynamic interplay between various institutional sub-elements as described below:

(i) Input: Institutional mission, vision and core values

An institution derives its collective ideology from its mission, vision, and core value framework. In terms of CE, this is important, considering that many best practice universities, which formed a part of this study, were guided by their core values and vision in implementing engaged practices since much earlier, and even before the recent policy push came into picture. Institutional ideology and beliefs with respect to the role of education institutions in effecting social development, is what has guided them in their community engaged efforts, since inception. Therefore, this framework proposes that the successful embedment of CE warrants, that its values be aligned with institutional values and be drawn from the latter, which functions as an ‘input’ to the whole process dynamics. Without this starting point, further processes aimed at embedment of internalization may not sustain in the long term. This aspect links well with the discussions in Chapter 4 on data analysis, particularly sub-theme 2.1 on ingraining CE as part of institutional culture, mindset and practices, under the second theme on institutionalizing CE. As such, this sub-element needs to be viewed in conjunction with sub-thematic section(s) 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, which discuss the importance of aligning CE with the institutional mission and vision and values. This then ensures the successful integration of CE philosophies within the institutional framework.

Furthermore, these insights also reflect in sub-theme 1.1, which focuses on the understanding the 'why' of CE, in terms of its philosophy and rationale. As discussed in the section, most of this understanding of CE stems from the institutional beliefs, its foundational premise and value systems. Therefore, in this light too, the aspect of institutional mission, vision and core values assumes increased importance, considering their impact on how an institution understands and practices CE.

(ii) Building blocks: Institutional personnel, structures and functions

In the context of CE, the core of the framework, as seen in the schematic; comprises of four main building blocks. Here, while the (a) *institutional leadership* stands at the left corner of the core; (b) *faculty members and students* are situated in the right corner. Further, while an (c) *institutional structure dedicated for CE* (CE centre/office) holds the top end of the core; (d) *traditional institutional functions of teaching, research and service* are placed at the bottom of the core. The framework proposes a dynamic interplay between all these blocks, comprising of active guidance and feedback, with the collective aim of infusing CE into the institutional fabric. This interplay is described in the form of bullet points, as follows:

- The first building block of institutional leadership and management, guided by the institutional mission, vision and core values, steers the process of the infusion of CE, into the institution and its educative practices. In this process and to create a collective vision, the institutional leadership can frame exclusive CE policies, craft specialized CE strategies and take steps to create an ecosystem which is enabling towards CE in all aspects, and at all levels of institutional processes. This also provides the basic foundation of how CE is conceptualized at the institution.

- The second building block of higher education personnel, comprising of faculty members, research scholars and students, who are the actual 'conductors' of CE; need basic support for taking forward the collective CE vision as laid down by the leadership. This support can take the form of specialized CE trainings for building understanding and related competencies, and provision of programmatic support for CE intervention in the field. Further, the provision of incentives for sustaining motivation for pursuing CE is also critical to offset the

competing demands emerging from other academic domains. These are important aspects contributing to the institutionalization and operationalization of CE at the institution.

- However, for all this to happen, there needs to be a synergy between efforts at various levels of the institution and in between different stakeholders. It is therefore, imperative to establish a structure dedicated for CE, for coordinating and managing CE activities. The proposed framework situates this structure as the next building block, sitting atop the core of the framework, which may comprise of representatives from different levels in the institution (leadership, faculty, scholars, students). This is important considering that, since institutionalizing CE is a team effort; therefore, ensuring that different stakeholders have a stake and say in the process, is of paramount importance. This structure, in addition to providing overall guidance for CE, can also help revise CE strategies and policies, through active feedback to the leadership, along with providing requisite guidance and support to the CE personnel at the departmental level.

- Most importantly, this active networking loop of guidance and feedback between the leadership, CE structure and personnel shapes up the design and operationalization of teaching, research and service functions, which forms the last building block of the framework core. While the leadership can guide the functions towards becoming more engaged, either directly, or through the CE centre; the reverse loop of feedback also exists. Here, feedback from the personnel can be provided to the CE structure, for better CE support, which can then provide similar reflective insights to the leadership. This feedback can also have implications on the design of teaching, research and service functions, which can then be looped in, by the leadership to further iterate CE plans and strategies for improved outcomes. These aspects also provide the basic scaffolding support for institutionalizing CE at the institution.

The above pointers provide insights into the dynamism and reflexivity involved in embedding CE into the core of the institutional domain. Simply put, it requires an active interplay between stakeholders, structures, and functions, which can ensure that the

engaged ideas laid down as policies or philosophies, are brought to fruition. This dynamic between institutional personnel, structures and functions, once again fits well within the discussions in Chapter 4 under the second theme of institutionalization of CE. In particular, aspects of institutional personnel and functions find clear links with sub-thematic section 21.3 which discussed the importance of team work and maintaining a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches; 2.1.4 on establishing linkages between CE and academic learning within the higher education functions of teaching, research and service; 2.15 on embedment of CE across different disciplines. Further, in terms of institutional structures, the pointers mentioned here, needs to be read and engaged critically, with respect to sub-theme 2.2 on developing supporting systems and infrastructure to embed CE into the institutional structure, which discusses at length, the development of common understanding and competencies on CE (section 2.2.1); establishment of institutional structures for advancing CE (section 2.2.2); recruitment of staff, under the centres (section 2.2.3) and other support systems by way of incentivization, administrative and logistical support and creation of knowledge sharing platforms (section(s) 2.2.4, 2.2.5 and 2.2.6.

(iii) Output: Community engaged teaching, research & service functions

The institutional core, comprising of different stakeholders and processes as described above, plays an important role in guiding the institutional functions towards embedding CE into the curricular ambit. However, in addition to the latter; the proposed framework also identifies another set of elements which are important to loop in and consider, for successfully transforming the traditional teaching, research and service functions into authentic and meaningful engaged academic interventions. These elements are described as follows:

- *Dynamism and innovation*: Teaching, research and service interventions need to be designed in a way that it enables contextually relevant learning and critical reflection. These are instrumental in developing competencies in innovative and collaborative problem-solving approaches, within the humanistic dimension. Here, the adoption of engaged approaches to teaching, learning, research, and service, such as human centred design, participatory learning and action, arts-based methods to diversify learning opportunities, can play a vital role in achieving the overall objective.

- *Flexibility and openness*: In the process of embedding CE into academic interventions, it is also important to make room for flexibility in designing courses, research projects or service activities. This includes incorporation of CE in existing courses, by way of projects, assignments, papers; designing new courses aligned with CE values; adopting community engaged approaches to research; and planning service interventions in a way, which can build citizenship values and empathy, rather than just being a rote, charitable activity.

- *Multi-disciplinarity*: In all approaches, it is important to ensure that programmatic activities (belonging to either of the domains of teaching, research or service) are not executed as siloed interventions, but incorporate aspects of multi-disciplinarity, as and where possible. As CE demands inputs from multiple disciplinary domains, skills and expertise; engaged practices ought to ideally bring together different disciplines to produce meaningful outcomes.

- *Diverse partnerships*: While the elements described above are mostly internal to an institution; establishing diverse external partnerships can crucially enrich engaged academic interventions. Such partnerships with an array of non-academic actors (like governments, local governmental institutions, NGOs, industry, etc.) can diversify CE opportunities and enable access to wide range of communities. Further, the skills and the resources that such partners bring into the partnership, can also help to refine the curriculum from a CE perspective and implement contextually relevant CE programs, respectively.

- *Achievement of academic objectives and social development outcomes and development of balanced competencies in students*: Finally, the ultimate objective of all such efforts should be aimed at nurturing learned, skilled and socially responsible citizens, who can emerge as harbingers of positive social change in a society, which is plagued with multi-faceted problems at multiple levels. This can be achieved through crafting engaged academic interventions by way of engaged teaching, engaged research, and engaged service, which

combines academic objectives and social development outcomes. In the process, it develops citizens with balanced competencies (cognitive, psychomotor, and affective) possessing knowledge, awareness and skills for effecting social change. Such citizens can then address challenges and produce solutions from the people's viewpoint; rather than being a robotic workforce, churning out mechanical solutions, which often fails to factor in contextual realities and humanistic perspectives.

These aspects and elements can then result into an institutional output in the form of community-engaged academic functions, which are not only contextually relevant, but also responsive to the same, in being able to contribute to solutions, thereby emerging as transformative in the long run. These nuances link directly with the emergent findings discussed in Chapter 4, under the theme of 'operationalization of CE at the interface of higher education functions. The underlying sub-themes in terms of embedment of CE within the teaching, research and service function(s) (3.1, 3.2 and 3.3) present an exhaustive and critical discussion on the notions of community engaged scholarships, methodologies and pedagogies, directly aligned to these functions. The discussions also produce useful insights which reflect in the above-mentioned elements, with respect to dynamism, innovation, creativity and fostering of external partnerships, which are crucial to effect community engaged teaching, research and service practices.

**3) Desired outcome: socially responsible HEI**

Given the contemporary social challenges, the entire academic community is now increasingly focused towards making higher education a socially responsible sector in the society. In India in particular, this debate is slowly gaining traction, which is evident from the growing practice of CE and its various forms, at different HEI's. However, as India is still early in the engagement journey, there are many HEI's are who are looking for support and guidance to further strengthen the practice of CE at their respective institutions. This study, conducted with this perspective in mind, therefore, proposes the given framework, which has outlined specific strategies and action pointers to be implemented at the level of HEI for guiding and strengthening CE in the latter. The framework also proposes that if such actions and interventions are carried out with sincerity, driven by CE values, and sustained over a period of time; it will not only lead

to the emergence of best practice CE models, but can also contribute towards achieving the desired outcome of creating a socially responsible HEI.

## 5.3 Limitations of the study

While the study was able to achieve its originally defined objectives, it was not devoid of limitations, which mainly centred around two aspects. *Firstly*, the qualitative nature of the study resulted in inclusion of a small sample of eight universities in the Indian higher education sector, which is vast and diverse. However, since qualitative studies focus more on information rich cases, as opposed to larger sample sizes, this research study was situated well and completed successfully. Furthermore, as CE is a relatively emerging trend in the Indian higher education landscape, not many institutions have begun engaging in the same. Accordingly, there are very few HEI's which have best practices related to CE. As such, the inclusion of eight HEI's and fifty participants, who are actively engaged, emerged as adequate to fulfil the objectives of the study. *Secondly*, the geographic representation of north-east India could not be included due to the delay in securing the gatekeeper permission letter from the respective university in the region. However, considering the in-depth and the exploratory nature of the research, the study ensured the representation of different types of universities (public, private and deemed-to-be) from all the major geographical regions of the country (north, south, east, west and centre). Notwithstanding the limitations, in-depth exploration of the research topic at various universities and with different academics, across both the samples (leadership and faculty members) was undertaken with thorough rigour. In doing so, it was ensured that the data collection process closed only when data saturation was reached, at each of the eight sample HEI's included in the study.

## 5.4 Recommendations for future research

It is against the backdrop of the emergent findings from the study and also the limitations as stated above, that the study proposes the following five areas for potential research in the future, to further explore and understand the practice of CE at Indian HEI's in a better way:

- In addition to the institutions selected in the study, there are many more non-mainstream HEI's who are practicing different models and adaptations of CE, suited to their own contexts. Therefore, there is a need to study and capture the practices of such institutions, especially the ones located in remote locations of in rural/tribal belts or hinterlands; so that appropriate recommendations can be provided for scaling and replication at the national level.
- Further, considering the length and breadth of the Indian higher education sector; more in-depth, regional studies can be undertaken to understand the nature and dimension of CE practices and how it varies from one geographical region to other, and the contributing factors towards the same.
- At the institutional level, research studies can use tools like the TEFCE (Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement of Higher Education) Toolbox, or some of its underlying features to prepare an institutional CE heatmap, to better understand the application of CE around the dimensions of teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange, etc. (O'Brien *et al.* 2022: 818). This can provide an authentic and empirical evidence base of the institutional CE practices, the societal needs addressed by it, diversity of communities engaged, embedment of CE within the institution, and the extent to which such practices are sustainable (O'Brien *et al.* 2022: 818).
- Future studies can also incorporate a multi-stakeholder study, involving academics, students, scholars, HEI leadership and external partners who engage with universities in the CE process, to gauge and assess the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats involved in such partnerships, and;
- Student experience is salient to understanding how they may benefit from community-based teaching and learning. As such, it is recommended that a future study consider how students understand CE, at Indian HEI's. For the purposes of the study, one of the focuses was on institutionalization of CE, which can only be achieved through the efforts of those in executive management in Indian HEI's. As such, students would not have been able to comment on this process.

- Considering the fact that many Indian institutions are still not actively involved in CE, a further study, of such institutions and their manifestations of connection with society, can be implemented, as a recommendation.
- As the CE movement gains momentum in India, backed by supportive national higher education policies, future studies may choose to take a closer look at the exact role of such national policies in guiding and strengthening this work, and, associated loopholes or gaps, if any.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a broad overview of the major findings emerging from the study and associated recommendations, in line with each of the study's objectives, focusing on the conceptualization of CE, its institutionalization, its operationalization, and relevant best practice models. In line with the last research objective, the chapter also presented a schematic framework for guiding and strengthening CE, at Indian higher education, supported with a detailed explanation of all its components and elements. Finally, the chapter also provided an account of limitations of the study and the attempts to offset it, while proposing specific pointers for future research in this area.

In conclusion, it is apt to close the chapter, and conclude the study, with the following quote by Dr Ernest Boyer, from one of his pioneering works, '*Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*', published by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (in the year 1990); which captures the essence of this study and its importance:

*"As we look at today's world, with its disturbingly complicated problems, higher learning, must, once again, adapt... [in this light], the most important obligation now confronting universities is to break out of the tired old teaching versus research debate and define, in more creative ways, what it means to be a scholar… It's time to recognize the full range of faculty talent and the great diversity of functions higher education must perform… [this is because], if the nation's higher learning institutions are to meet today's urgent academic and social mandates, their missions must be carefully redefined and the meaning of scholarship creatively reconsidered... [therefore], a new vision of scholarship is required, one dedicated not only to the*

*renewal of the academy but, ultimately, to the renewal of society itself"* (Boyer 1990: 81, xii, 13).

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**Appendix 1**

## FORMAL REQUEST LETTER FOR UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPERS FOR SEEKING PERMISSION FOR CONDUCTION OF INTERVIEWS

Full name of the competent authority Date:
Designation
University name and address

**SUB: Request for permission to conduct research**

Dear Professor 'X'

I wish to introduce myself as Mrs. Wafa Singh, a PhD student at Durban University of Technology (DUT), South Africa.

The research I wish to conduct for my doctoral thesis is titled: *"Towards the conceptualization and institutionalization of community engagement in India. An exploratory study at Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEI's)".*

I would hereby like to seek your permission to conduct my study at your university, which will include interviewing academics at the university. The potential interviewees will include an initial minimum sample of executive administrators (belonging to sample 1; N=2) and faculty members (belonging to sample 2; N=3).

I also seek your help/assistance for the recruitment of potential participants for sample 1 (who will then be consulted for recruiting participants for sample 2). The recruitment process will continue until data saturation occurs.

Please find attached a copy of my proposal, which includes copies of data collection tools and information letter and consent forms to be used in the research process. Please also find attached a copy of the letter of approval I received from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) at DUT.

Should you wish to have any additional information; you may please reach me on my cell number: +91-8470099600, or through email at: 'wafasingh86@gmail.com'.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs. Wafa Singh
PhD Scholar
Durban University of Technology

**Appendix 2**

## LETTER OF INFORMATION: SAMPLE 1 (UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS)

**Title of the research study:** Towards the conceptualization and institutionalization of community engagement in India: An exploratory study at Indian Higher Education Institutions

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Mrs. Wafa Singh; Master's in Sciences, Water Resources Management.

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Prof Raisuyah Bhagwan (PhD: Community and Development), Department of Community Health Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences, Durban University of Technology (DUT).

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:**

India is facing some of the most unprecedented challenges of modern times, on several fronts. Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEI's)-- being in a unique position to contribute meaningfully towards achieving social development outcomes at local, regional and national levels—can address some of such challenges by practicing effective Community Engagement (CE). Globally, CE is documented as having immense positive outcome on socio-economic development and in addressing pressing social challenges/issues. However, India has lagged behind in this regard. Further, there have been negligible studies to explore the practice of CE in Indian HEI's or to strengthen it, for achieving developmental outcomes. As a result, both the literature on CE and its practice, is ridden with gaps and inadequacies. However, with the launch of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) Guidelines 2020 (both of which promote CE in different capacities), a step forward has been taken. Nevertheless, a lot remains to be done to fill the gaps in this area of work, so that the untapped potential of CE in Indian HEI's for achieving sustainable social development, can be harnessed. This is more important in the context of the COVID-19 and especially in relation to the reconstruction of societies post the pandemic, wherein the HEI's will have an important role to play; and the CE practices adopted by them, will be an important means to this end.

This study intends to explore and assess the current understanding, conceptualization, operationalization, institutionalization, integration in higher

education missions (of teaching, research and service) and various manifestations of CE in Indian HEI's. This study will also attempt to document the best practices/adaptations of CE in Indian HEI's, with an ultimate objective of developing a framework, which will advance and strengthen CE in Indian HEI's, by proposing articulate recommendations for all concerned stakeholders from a practical viewpoint.

**Outline of the procedures**:

As part of data collection for the study, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to collect the required information. Each interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. You are expected to share your experiences, insights and perspectives on the research topic. Specific questions will be asked to assist/guide you for sharing the required information. The interviews will be conducted either face to face or through digital/virtual mediums of communication, depending on the pandemic situation. The interviews will be recorded on a tape recorder to gather all information that is being shared (this will be done only after receiving your consent). These recordings will be handled with utmost confidentiality. The only expectation from you will be to be present on time for the interview and to share as much information as possible on the questions and topics discussed.

**Risks or discomforts to the participant:** There will be no risk or discomfort to you, and to ensure a smooth process, everything (including interview plan, time and place) will be coordinated and intimated, well in advance.

**Reasons why the participant may withdraw from the study:** You are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time, if you are not comfortable.

**Benefits:** There will be no direct benefits that will be handed over to you. However, your experiences and ideas will be a valuable contribution to the research. The results of the study will be published in accredited journals, and a copy of the same will be duly shared with you, if you wish to have it.

**Remuneration:** There will be no remuneration for participating in the study (i.e. no payment will be made).

**Costs of the study**: You are not expected to cover any costs towards this study.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** All information discussed/disclosed in the interviews will be noted as anonymous. Your identity will not be revealed for the purposes of confidentiality. The taped recordings will be stored in a safety volt. No person will have access to the recordings other than the researcher. The results of the study, including personal details will be anonymously processed into a study report. The institution's names will also be encoded. Your name will not be used anywhere in the research process and the outputs. Pseudonyms for reference purpose in the process. It will also be ensured that your name is removed from all recordings in the transcription process.

**Research-related injury:** As this is a non-experimental study, there will be no physical harm to you.

**Persons to contact in the event of any problems or queries:** Should there be any problem, issue, or additional questions, please contact the researcher:

Mrs. Wafa Singh
Cell number: +91-8470099600
Email: wafasingh86@gmail.com

If you are still not satisfied, please contact my research supervisor:

Name: Professor Raisuyah Bhagwan
Office number: 031 3173219
Email: bhagwanr@dut.ac.za

Details of my co-supervisor are:

Name: Professor Manju Singh
Office number: 0141-2715060
Email: manjus.hum@mnit.ac.in

IREC administrator:

Name: Ms. L. Deonarian
Office number: 031 37320
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za

Complaints may be reported to:

The Director; Research and Postgraduate Support
Dr Linganiso
Office number: 031 373 2577
Email: researchdirector@dut.ac.za

**Appendix 3**

## LETTER OF INFORMATION: SAMPLE 2 (FACULTY MEMBERS)

**Title of the Research Study:** Towards the conceptualization and institutionalization of community engagement in India: An exploratory study at Indian Higher Education Institutions.

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Mrs. Wafa Singh; Master's in Sciences, Water Resources Management.

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Prof Raisuyah Bhagwan (PhD: Community and Development), Department of Community Health Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences, Durban University of Technology (DUT).

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:**

India is facing some of the most unprecedented challenges of modern times, on several fronts. Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEI's)-- being in a unique position to contribute meaningfully towards achieving social development outcomes at local, regional and national levels—can address some of such challenges by practicing effective Community Engagement (CE). Globally, CE is documented as having immense positive outcome on socio-economic development and in addressing pressing social challenges/issues. However, India has lagged behind in this regard. Further, there have been negligible studies to explore the practice of CE in Indian HEI's or strengthen it, for achieving developmental outcomes. As a result, both the literature on CE and its practice, is ridden with gaps and inadequacies. However, with the launch of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and the University Grants Commission Guidelines (UGC) 2020 (both of which promote CE in different capacities), a step forward has been taken. Nevertheless, a lot remains to be done to fill the gaps in this area of work, so that the untapped potential of CE in Indian HEI's for achieving sustainable social development, can be harnessed. This is more important in the context of the COVID-19 and especially in relation to the reconstruction of societies post the pandemic, wherein the HEI's will have an important role to play; and the CE practices adopted by them, will be an important means to this end.

This study intends to explore and assess the current understanding, conceptualization, operationalization, institutionalization, integration in higher education missions (of teaching, research and service) and various manifestations of CE in Indian HEI's. This study will also attempt to document the best practices/adaptations of CE in Indian HEI's, with an ultimate objective of developing a framework, which will advance and strengthen CE in Indian HEI's, by proposing articulate recommendations for all concerned stakeholders from a practical viewpoint.

**Outline of the Procedures**:

As part of data collection for the study, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to collect the required information. Each interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. You are expected to share your experiences, insights and perspectives on the research topic. Specific questions will be asked to assist/guide you for sharing the required information. The interviews will be conducted either face to face or through digital/virtual mediums of communication, depending on the pandemic situation. The interviews will be recorded on a tape recorder to gather all information that is being shared (this will be done only after receiving your consent). These recordings will be handled with utmost confidentiality. The only expectation from you will be to be present on time for the interview and to share as much information as possible on the questions and topics discussed.

**Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:** There will be no risk or discomfort to you, and to ensure a smooth process, everything (including interview plan, time and place) will be coordinated and intimated, well in advance.

**Reasons why a participant may withdraw from the study:** You are entitled to withdraw from the study at any time, if you are not comfortable.

**Benefits:** There will be no direct benefits that will be handed over to you. However, your experiences and ideas will be a valuable contribution to the research. The results of the study will be published in accredited journals, and a copy of the same will be duly shared with you, if you wish to have it.

**Remuneration:** There will be no remuneration for participating in the study (i.e. no payment will be made).

**Costs of the Study**: You are not expected to cover any costs towards this study.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** All information discussed/disclosed in the interviews will be noted as anonymous. Your identity will not be revealed for the purposes of confidentiality. The taped recordings will be stored in a safety volt. No person will have access to the recordings other than the researcher. The results of the study, including personal details will be anonymously processed into a study report. The institution's names will also be encoded. Your name will not be used anywhere in the research

process and the outputs. Pseudonyms for reference purpose in the process. It will also be ensured that your name is removed from all recordings in the transcription process.

**Results:** The results of the study will be converted into a research report, and accredited publications.

**Research-related Injury:** As this is a non-experimental study, there will be no physical harm to you.

**Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:** Should there be any problem, issue, or additional questions, please contact the researcher:

Mrs. Wafa Singh
Cell number: +91-8470099600
Email: wafasingh86@gmail.com

If you are still not satisfied, please contact my research supervisor:

Name: Professor Raisuyah Bhagwan
Office number: 031 3173219
Email: bhagwanr@dut.ac.za

Details of my co-supervisor are:

Name: Professor Manju Singh
Office number: 0141-2715060
Email: manjus.hum@mnit.ac.in

IREC administrator:

Name: Ms. L. Deonarian
Office number: 031 37320
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za

Complaints may be reported to:

The Director; Research and Postgraduate Support
Dr Linganiso
Office number: 031 373 2577
Email: researchdirector@dut.ac.za

**Appendix 4**

## CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

**Statement of agreement to participate in the research study:**

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Mrs. Wafa Singh, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study-Research Ethics Clearance number: 202/21.
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Full name of participant** | **Date** | **Time** | **Signature** |

I, Mrs. Wafa Singh, confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the proposed study

| Wafa Singh | _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Full name of researcher | Date | Time | Signature |

| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Full name of witness (if applicable) | Date | Time | Signature |

## Appendix 5

## PROVISIONAL ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE (ISSUED BY IREC, DUT)

Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Berwyn Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics

www.dut.ac.za

23 November 2021

Mrs W Singh
Flat #1204
Block- G1
The Meadows
Adani Shantigram
Adalaj
Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Higway
Ahmedabad-382421
Gujarat
India

Dear Mrs Singh

**Towards the conceptualization and institutionalization of community engagement in India: An exploratory study at Indian Higher Education Institutions**

I am pleased to inform you that **PROVISIONAL APPROVAL** has been granted to your proposal subject to:

- Obtaining and submitting the necessary gatekeeper permission/s to Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT A FINAL APPROVAL LETTER. KINDLY SUBMIT THE ABOVE MENTIONED DOCUMENTS WITHIN THREE MONTHS TO THE IREC OFFICE. DATA COLLECTION CAN ONLY COMMENCE WHEN IREC ISSUES FULL APPROVAL

The Proposal has been allocated the following Ethical Clearance number **IREC 202/21**. Please use this number in all communication with this office.

Approval has been granted for a period of **ONE YEAR**, before the expiry of which you are required to apply for safety monitoring and annual recertification. Please use the Safety Monitoring and Annual Recertification Report form which can be found in the Standard Operating Procedures [SOP's] of the IREC. This form must be submitted to the IREC at least 3 months before the ethics approval for the study expires.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC

## Appendix 6

## FINAL ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE (ISSUED BY IREC, DUT)

Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Berwyn Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics

www.dut.ac.za

28 February 2022

Mrs W Singh
Flat #1204
Block- G1
The Meadows
Adani Shantigram
Adalaj
Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Higway
Ahmedabad-382421
Gujarat
India

Dear Mrs Singh

**Towards the conceptualization and institutionalization of community engagement in India: An exploratory study at Indian Higher Education Institutions**
Ethical Clearance number **IREC 202/21**

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC

**Appendix 7**

## INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS (SAMPLE 1)

1. Can you briefly share general perspectives about your institution, especially with respect to the value it places on aspects like social responsibility?

2. How do you understand the term ‘community engagement’?

3. What are the basic tenets which builds the foundation of the practice of community engagement, as practiced at your institution?

4. What are your views on how community engagement can be institutionalized in Indian higher education institutions?

5. What are the challenges that emerge in the institutionalization context, and how can it be overcome?

6. How does community engagement fit into the teaching, research, service function at your institution? Or how is it integrated into the curriculum?

7. What value does community engagement add to academic teaching and learning?

8. Please share some of your institutional best practices with respect to community engagement or social responsibility.

9. How can the practice of community engagement be strengthened in Indian higher education institutions?

10. Would you like to share/add any other related aspect in this regard, and/or can you suggest someone else whom I could speak with, to get further insights on my research study?

**Appendix 8**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FACULTY MEMBERS AT UNIVERSITIES (SAMPLE 2)**

1. Can you briefly share general perspectives about your institution and department, especially with respect to the value it places on aspects like social responsibility?

2. How do you understand the term ‘community engagement’?

3. What are the basic tenets which builds the foundation of the practice of community engagement, as practiced at your institution and your department in particular?

4. What are your views on how community engagement can be institutionalized in Indian higher education institutions?

5. What are the challenges that emerge in the institutionalization context, and how can it be overcome?

6. How does community engagement fit into the teaching, research, service function at your institution, especially your department? Or how is it integrated into the curriculum?

7. What value does community engagement add to academic teaching and learning, especially with respect to your discipline?

8. Please share some of the institutional best practices or your departmental best practices with respect to community engagement or social responsibility.

9. How can the practice of community engagement be strengthened in Indian higher education institutions and at the departmental level?

10. Would you like to share/add any other related aspect in this regard, and/or can you suggest someone else whom I could speak with, to get further insights on my research study?

## *I am so grateful!*

*Gratitude is more than being thankful! When the emotion is expressed, it's about giving more than handful, and yet feeling blessed!*

*Gratitude is being grateful for whatever we achieve, cause more we are faithful, the better we conceive!*

*Gratitude is being humble, to the world we see! Caring for one and other and appreciation is the key!*

*Gratitude is an acknowledgement of all the wonderful deeds! A feeling of gratitude should be sown, cause that's all we need*

-Ryson D'Souza